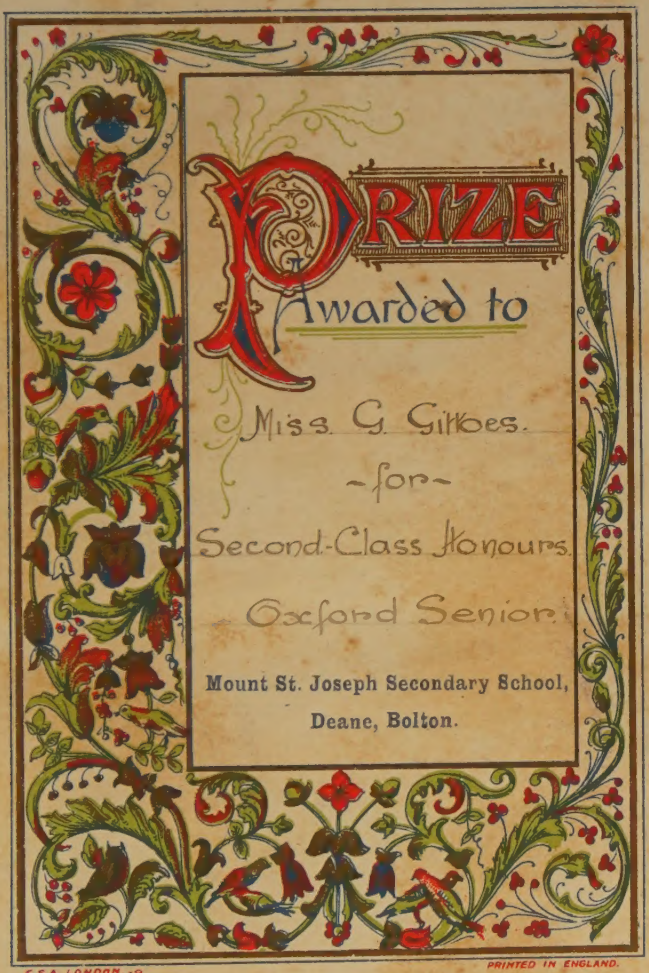

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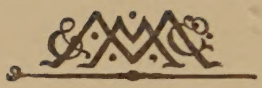
ENGLISH MEN OF LETTERS

EDITED BY JOHN MORLEY

DICKENS



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ENGLISH MEN OF LETTERS

DICKENS

BY

ADOLPHUS WILLIAM WARD

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PREFACE.

At the close of a letter addressed by Dickens to his friend John Forster, but not to be found in the English editions of the *Life*, the writer adds to his praises of the biography of Goldsmith these memorable words: "I desire no better for my fame, when my personal dustiness shall be past the control of my love of order, than such a biographer and such a critic." Dickens was a man of few close friendships—"his breast," he said, "would not hold many people;" but of these friendships, that with Forster was one of the earliest, as it was one of the most enduring. To Dickens at least his future biographer must have been the embodiment of two qualities rarely combined in equal measure—discretion and candour. In literary matters his advice was taken almost as often as it was given, and nearly every proof-sheet of nearly every work of Dickens passed through his faithful helpmate's hands. Nor were there many important decisions formed by Dickens concerning himself in the course of his manhood, to which Forster was a stranger, though, unhappily, he more than once counselled in vain.

On Mr. Forster's *Life of Charles Dickens*, together with the three volumes of *Letters* collected by Dickens' eldest daughter and his sister-in-law—his "dearest and best friend"—it is superfluous to state that the biographical portion of the following essay is mainly based. It may also be superfluous, but it cannot be considered impertinent, if I add that the shortcomings of the *Life* have, in my opinion, been more frequently proclaimed than defined; and that its merits are those of its author as well as of its subject.

My sincere thanks are due for various favours shown to me in connexion with the production of this little volume by

Miss Hogarth, Mr. Charles Dickens, Professor Henry Morley, Mr. Alexander Ireland, Mr. John Evans, Mr. Robinson, and Mr. Britton. Mr. Evans has kindly enabled me to correct some inaccuracies in Mr. Forster's account of Dickens' early Chatham days on unimpeachable first-hand evidence. I also beg Captain and Mrs. Budden to accept my thanks for allowing me to see Gad's Hill Place.

I am under special obligations to Mr. R. F. Sketchley, Librarian of the Dyce and Forster Libraries at South Kensington, for his courtesy in affording me much useful aid and information. With the kind permission of Mrs. Forster, Mr. Sketchley enabled me to supplement the records of Dickens' life, in the period 1838–1841, from a hitherto unpublished source—a series of brief entries by him in four volumes of *The Law and Commercial Daily Remembrancer* for those years. These volumes formed no part of the Forster bequest, but were added to it, under certain conditions, by Mrs. Forster. The entries are mostly very brief; and sometimes there are months without an entry. Many days succeed one another with no other note than "Work."

Mr. R. H. Shepherd's *Bibliography of Dickens* has been of considerable service to me. May I take this opportunity of commending to my readers, as a charming reminiscence of the connexion between *Charles Dickens and Rochester*, Mr. Robert Langton's sketches illustrating a paper recently printed by him under that title?

Last, not least, as the Germans say, I wish to thank my friend Professor T. N. Toller for the friendly counsel which has not been wanting to me on this, any more than on former occasions.

A. W. W.

Manchester, March 1882.

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DICKENS.

CHAPTER I.

BEFORE PICKWICK.

1812—1836.

Charles Dickens, the eldest son, and the second of the eight children, of John and Elizabeth Dickens, was born at Landport, a suburb of Portsea, on Friday, February 7th, 1812. His baptismal names were Charles John Huffham. His father, at that time a clerk in the Navy Pay Office, and employed in the Portsmouth Dockyard, was recalled to London when his eldest son was only two years of age; and two years afterwards was transferred to Chatham, where he resided with his family from 1816 to 1821. Thus Chatham, and the more venerable city of Rochester adjoining, with their neighbourhood of chalk hills and deep green lanes and woodland and marshes, became, in the words of Dickens' biographer, the birthplace of his fancy. He looked upon himself as, to all intents and purposes, a Kentish man born and bred, and his heart was always in this particular corner of the incomparable county. Again and again, after Mr. Alfred Jingle's spasmodic eloquence had, in

the very first number of *Pickwick*, epitomised the antiquities and comforts of Rochester, already the scene of one of the *Sketches*, Dickens returned to the local associations of his early childhood. It was at Chatham that poor little David Copperfield, on his solitary tramp to Dover, slept his Sunday night's sleep "near a cannon, happy in the society of the sentry's footsteps;" and in many a Christmas narrative or uncommercial etching the familiar features of town and country, of road and river, were reproduced, before in *Great Expectations* they suggested some of the most picturesque effects of his later art, and before in his last unfinished romance his faithful fancy once more haunted the well-known precincts. During the last thirteen years of his life he was again an inhabitant of the loved neighbourhood where, with the companions of his mirthful idleness, he had so often made holiday; where, when hope was young, he had spent his honeymoon; and whither, after his last restless wanderings, he was to return, to seek such repose as he would allow himself, and to die. But, of course, the daily life of the "very queer small boy" of that early time is only quite incidentally to be associated with the grand gentleman's house on Gad's Hill, where his father, little thinking that his son was to act over again the story of Warren Hastings and Daylesford, had told him he might some day come to live, if he were to be very persevering, and to work hard. The family abode was in Ordnance (not St. Mary's) Place at Chatham, amidst surroundings classified in Mr. Pickwick's notes as "appearing to be soldiers, sailors, Jews, chalk, shrimps, offices, and dockyard men." But though the half-mean half-picturesque aspect of the Chatham streets

may already at an early age have had its fascination for Dickens, yet his childish fancy was fed as fully as were his powers of observation. Having learnt reading from his mother, he was sent with his elder sister, Fanny, to a day-school kept in Gibraltar Place, New Road, by Mr. William Giles, the eldest son and namesake of a worthy Baptist Minister, whose family had formed an intimate acquaintance with their neighbours in Ordnance Row. The younger Giles children were pupils at the school of their elder brother with Charles and Fanny Dickens, and thus naturally their constant playmates. In later life, Dickens preserved a grateful remembrance, at times refreshed by pleasant communications between the families, of the training he had received from Mr. William Giles, an intelligent as well as generous man, who, recognising his pupil's abilities, seems to have resolved that they should not lie fallow for want of early cultivation. Nor does there appear to be the slightest reason for supposing that this period of his life was anything but happy. For his sister Fanny he always preserved a tender regard; and a touching little paper, written by him after her death in womanhood, relates how the two children used to watch the stars together, and make friends with one in particular, as belonging to themselves. But obviously he did not lack playmates of his own sex; and it was no doubt chiefly because his tastes made him disinclined to take much part in the rougher sports of his schoolfellows, that he found plenty of time for amusing himself in his own way. And thus it came to pass that already as a child he followed his own likings in the two directions from which they were never very materially to swerve. He once said of himself that he had been "a writer when a mere baby, an actor always."

Of these two passions he could always, as a child and

as a man, be "happy with either," and occasionally with both at the same time. In his tender years he was taken by a kinsman, a Sandhurst cadet, to the theatre, to see the legitimate drama acted, and was disillusioned by visits behind the scenes at private theatricals; while his own juvenile powers as a teller of stories and singer of comic songs (he was possessed, says one who remembers him, of a sweet treble voice) were displayed on domestic chairs and tables, and then in amateur plays with his schoolfellows. He also wrote a—not strictly original—tragedy, which is missing among his *Reprinted Pieces*. There is nothing unique in these childish doings, nor in the circumstance that he was an eager reader of works of fiction; but it is noteworthy that chief among the books to which he applied himself in a small neglected bookroom in his father's house, were those to which his allegiance remained true through much of his career as an author. Besides books of travel, which he says had a fascination for his mind from his earliest childhood, besides the Arabian Nights and kindred tales, and the English Essayists, he read Fielding and Smollett, and Cervantes and Le Sage, in all innocence of heart, as well as Mrs. Inchbald's collection of farces in all contentment of spirit. Inasmuch as he was no great reader in the days of his authorship, and had to go through hard times of his own before, it was well that the literature of his childhood was good of its kind, and that where it was not good it was at least gay. Dickens afterwards made it an article of his social creed, that the imagination of the young needs nourishment as much as their bodies require food and clothing; and he had reason for gratefully remembering that at all events the imaginative part of his education had escaped neglect.

But these pleasant early days came to a sudden end. In the year 1821 his family returned to London, and soon his experiences of trouble began. Misfortune pursued the elder Dickens to town, his salary having been decreased already at Chatham in consequence of one of the early efforts at economical reform. He found a shabby home for his family in Bayham Street, Camden Town; and here, what with the pecuniary embarrassments in which he was perennially involved, and what with the easy disposition with which he was blessed by way of compensation, he allowed his son's education to take care of itself. John Dickens appears to have been an honourable as well as a kindly man. His son always entertained an affectionate regard for him, and carefully arranged for the comfort of his latter years; nor would it be fair, because of a similarity in their experiences, and in the grandeur of their habitual phraseology, to identify him absolutely with the immortal Mr. Micawber. Still less, except in certain details of manner and incident, can the character of the elder Dickens be thought to have suggested that of the pitiful "Father of the Marshalsea," to which prison, almost as famous in English fiction as it is in English history, the unlucky navy-clerk was consigned a year after his return to London.

Every effort had been made to stave off the evil day; and little Charles, whose eyes were always wide open, and who had begun to write descriptive sketches of odd personages among his acquaintance, had become familiar with the inside of a pawnbroker's shop, and had sold the paternal "library" piecemeal to the original of the drunken second-hand bookseller, with whom David Copperfield dealt as Mr. Micawber's representative. But neither these sacrifices, nor Mrs. Dickens' abortive efforts

at setting up an educational establishment, had been of avail. Her husband's creditors *would not* give him time; and a dark period began for the family, and more especially for the little eldest son, now ten years old, in which, as he afterwards wrote in bitter anguish of remembrance, "but for the mercy of God, he might easily have become, for any care that was taken of him, a little robber or a little vagabond."

Forster has printed the pathetic fragment of autobiography, communicated to him by Dickens five-and-twenty years after the period to which it refers, and subsequently incorporated with but few changes in the *Personal History of David Copperfield*. Who can forget the thrill with which he first learnt the well-kept secret, that the story of the solitary child, left a prey to the cruel chances of the London streets, was an episode in the life of Charles Dickens himself? Between fact and fiction there was but a difference of names. Murdstone and Grinby's wine warehouse down in Blackfriars, was Jonathan Warren's blacking warehouse at Hungerford Stairs, in which a place had been found for the boy by a relative, a partner in the concern; and the bottles he had to paste over with labels were in truth blacking-pots. But the menial work and the miserable pay, the uncongenial companionship during worktime, and the speculative devices of the dinner-hour, were the same in each case. At this time, after his family had settled itself in the Marshalsea, the haven open to the little waif at night was a lodging in Little College Street, Camden Town, presenting even fewer attractions than Mr. Micawber's residence in Windsor Terrace, and kept by a lady, afterwards famous under the name of Mrs. Pipchin. His Sundays were spent at home in the prison.

On his urgent remonstrance—"the first I had ever made about my lot"—concerning the distance from his family at which he was left through the week, a back attic was found for him in Lant Street in the Borough, "where Bob Sawyer lodged many years afterwards;" and he now breakfasted and supped with his parents in their apartment. Here they lived in fair comfort, waited upon by a faithful "orfling," who had accompanied the family and its fortunes from Chatham, and who is said by Forster to have her part in the character of the Marchioness. Finally, after the prisoner had obtained his discharge, and had removed with his family to the Lant Street lodgings, a quarrel occurred between the elder Dickens and his cousin, and the boy was in consequence taken away from the business.

He had not been ill-treated there; nor indeed is it ill-treatment which leads to David Copperfield's running away in the story. Nevertheless, it is not strange that Dickens should have looked back with a bitterness very unusual in him, upon the bad old days of his childish solitude and degradation. He never "forgot" his mother's having wished him to remain in the warehouse; the subject of his employment there was never afterwards mentioned in the family; he could not bring himself to go near old Hungerford Market so long as it remained standing; and to no human being, not even to his wife, did he speak of this passage in his life, until he narrated it in the fragment of autobiography which he confided to his trusty friend. Such a sensitiveness is not hard to explain; for no man is expected to dilate upon the days "when he lived among the beggars in St. Mary Axe," and it is only the Bounderbies of society who exult, truly or falsely, in the sordid memories of the time before they became rich or powerful.

And if the sharp experiences of his childhood might have ceased to be resented by one whom the world on the whole treated so kindly, at least they left his heart unhardened, and helped to make him ever tender to the poor and weak, because he too had after a fashion "eaten his bread with tears" when a puny child.

A happy accident having released the David Copperfield of actual life from his unworthy bondage, he was put in the way of an education such as at that time was the lot of most boys of the class to which he belonged. "The world has done much better since in that way, and will do far better yet," he writes at the close of his description of *Our School*, the "Wellington House Academy," situate near that point in the Hampstead Road where modest gentility and commercial enterprise touch hands. Other testimony confirms his sketch of the ignorant and brutal head-master; and doubtless this worthy and his usher, "considered to know everything as opposed to the chief who was considered to know nothing," furnished some of the features in the portraits of Mr. Creakle and Mr. Mell. But it has been very justly doubted by an old schoolfellow, whether the statement "We were First Boy" is to be regarded as strictly historical. If Charles Dickens, when he entered the school, was "put into Virgil," he was not put there to much purpose. On the other hand, with the return of happier days, had come the resumption of the old amusements which were to grow into the occupations of his life. A club was founded among the boys at Wellington House for the express purpose of circulating short tales written by him, and he was the manager of the private theatricals which they contrived to set on foot.

After two or three years of such work and play it became necessary for Charles Dickens once more to

think of earning his bread. His father, who had probably lost his official post at the time when, in Mr. Micawber's phrase, "hope sunk beneath the horizon," was now seeking employment as a parliamentary reporter, and must have rejoiced when a Gray's Inn solicitor of his acquaintance, attracted by the bright clever looks of his son, took the lad into his office as a clerk at a modest weekly salary. His office associates here were perhaps a grade or two above those of the blacking warehouse; but his danger now lay rather in the direction of the vulgarity which he afterwards depicted in such samples of the profession as Mr. Guppy and Mr. Jobling. He is said to have frequented, in company with a fellow-clerk, one of the minor theatres, and even occasionally to have acted there; and assuredly it must have been personal knowledge which suggested the curiously savage description of *Private Theatres* in the *Sketches by Boz*, the all but solitary *unkindly* reference to theatrical amusements in his works. But whatever his experiences of this kind may have been, he passed unscathed through them; and during the year and a half of his clerkship picked up sufficient knowledge of the technicalities of the law to be able to assail its enormities without falling into rudimentary errors about it, and sufficient knowledge of lawyers and lawyers' men to fill a whole chamber in his gallery of characters.

Oddly enough, it was, after all, the example of the father that led the son into the line of life from which he was easily to pass into the career where success and fame awaited him. The elder Dickens having obtained employment as a parliamentary reporter for the *Morning Herald*, his son, who was living with him in Bentinck Street, Manchester Square, resolved to essay the same laborious craft. He was by this time nearly seventeen years of age, and already we notice in

him what were to remain, through life, two of his most marked characteristics—strength of will, and a determination, if he did a thing at all, to do it thoroughly. The art of shorthand, which he now resolutely set himself to master, was in those days no easy study, though, possibly, in looking back upon his first efforts, David Copperfield overestimated the difficulties which he had conquered with the help of love and Traddles. But Dickens, whose education no Dr. Strong had completed, perceived that in order to succeed as a reporter of the highest class he needed something besides the knowledge of shorthand. In a word, he lacked reading; and this deficiency he set himself to supply as best he could by a constant attendance at the British Museum. Those critics who have dwelt on the fact that the reading of Dickens was neither very great nor very extensive, have insisted on what is not less true than obvious; but he had this one quality of the true lover of reading, that he never professed a familiarity with that of which he knew little or nothing. He continued his visits to the Museum, even when in 1828 he had become a reporter in Doctors' Commons. With this occupation he had to remain as content as he could for nearly two years. Once more David Copperfield, the double of Charles Dickens in his youth, will rise to the memory of every one of his readers. For not only was his soul seized with a weariness of Consistory, Arches, Delegates, and the rest of it, to which he afterwards gave elaborate expression in his story, but his heart was full of its first love. In later days, he was not of opinion that he had loved particularly wisely; but how well he had loved is known to everyone who after him has lost his heart to Dora. Nothing came of the fancy, and in course of time he had composure enough to visit the lady who had been its

object in the company of his wife. He found that Jip was stuffed as well as dead, and that Dora had faded into Flora; for it was as such that, not very chivalrously, he could bring himself to describe her, for the second time, in *Little Dorrit*.

Before at last he was engaged as a reporter on a newspaper, he had, and not for a moment only, thought of turning aside to another profession. It was the profession to which—uncommercially—he was attached during so great a part of his life, that when he afterwards created for himself a stage of his own, he seemed to be but following an irresistible fascination. His best friend described him to me as "a born actor;" and who needs to be told that the world falls into two divisions only—those whose place is before the footlights, and those whose place is behind them? His love of acting was stronger than himself; and I doubt whether he ever saw a play successfully performed without longing to be in and of it. "Assumption," he wrote in after days to Lord Lytton, "has charms for me—I hardly know for how many wild reasons—so delightful that I feel a loss of, oh! I can't say what exquisite foolery, when I lose a chance of being someone in voice, etc. not at all like myself." He loved the theatre and everything which savoured of histrionics with an intensity not even to be imagined by those who have never felt a touch of the same passion. He had that "belief in a play" which he so pleasantly described as one of the characteristics of his lifelong friend, the great painter Clarkson Stanfield. And he had that unextinguishable interest in both actors and acting which makes a little separate world of the "quality." One of the stanchest friendships of his life was that with the foremost English tragedian of his age, Macready; one of the

delights of his last years was his intimacy with another well-known actor, the late Mr. Fechter. No performer, however, was so obscure or so feeble as to be outside the pale of his sympathy. His books teem with kindly likenesses of all manner of entertainers and entertainments—from Mr. Vincent Crummles and the more or less legitimate drama, down to Mr. Sleary's horse-riding and Mrs. Jarley's wax-work. He has a friendly feeling for Chops the dwarf, and for Pickleson the giant; and in his own quiet Broadstairs he cannot help tumultuously applauding a young lady "who goes into the den of ferocious lions, tigers, leopards, etc. and pretends to go to sleep upon the principal lion, upon which a rustic keeper, who speaks through his nose, exclaims: 'Behold the abazid power of woobad!'" He was unable to sit through a forlorn performance at a wretched country theatre, without longing to add a sovereign to the four and ninepence which he had made out in the house when he entered, and which "had warmed up in the course of the evening to twelve shillings;" and in Bow Street, near his office, he was beset by appeals such as that of an aged and greasy suitor for an engagement as Pantaloon: "Mr. Dickens, you know our profession, sir—no one knows it better, sir—there is no right feeling in it. I was Harlequin on your own circuit, sir, for five-and-thirty years, and was displaced by a boy, sir! —a boy!" Nor did his disposition change when he crossed the seas; the streets he first sees in the United States remind him irresistibly of the set-scene in a London pantomime; and at Verona his interest is divided between *Romeo and Juliet* and the vestiges of an equestrian troupe in the amphitheatre.

What success Dickens might have achieved as an actor

it is hardly to the present purpose to inquire. A word will be said below of the success he achieved as an amateur actor and manager, and in his more than half dramatic readings. But, the influence of early associations and personal feelings apart, it would seem that the artists of the stage whom he most admired were not those of the highest type. He was subdued by the genius of Frédéric Lemaître, but blind and deaf to that of Ristori. "Sound melodrama and farce" were the dramatic species which he affected, and in which as a professional actor he might have excelled. His intensity might have gone for much in the one, and his versatility and volubility for more in the other, and in both, as indeed in any kind of play or part, his thoroughness, which extended itself to every detail of performance or make-up, must have stood him in excellent stead. As it was, he was preserved for literature. But he had carefully prepared himself for his intended venture, and when he sought an engagement at Covent Garden, a preliminary interview with the manager was postponed only on account of the illness of the applicant.

Before the next theatrical season opened, he had at last —in the year 1831—obtained employment as a parliamentary reporter, and after some earlier engagements he became, in 1834, one of the reporting staff of the famous Whig *Morning Chronicle*, then in its best days under the editorship of Mr. John Black. Now, for the first time in his life, he had an opportunity of putting forth the energy that was in him. He shrank from none of the difficulties which in those days attended the exercise of his craft. They were thus depicted by himself, when a few years before his death he "held a brief for his brothers" at the dinner of the Newspaper Press Fund: "I have often transcribed for the printer from my

shorthand notes important public speeches in which the strictest accuracy was required, and a mistake in which would have been to a young man severely compromising; writing on the palm of my hand, by the light of a dark lantern, in a post-chaise and four, galloping through a wild country, and through the dead of the night, at the then surprising rate of fifteen miles an hour. . . . I have worn my knees by writing on them on the old back row of the old gallery of the old House of Commons; and I have worn my feet by standing to write in a preposterous pen in the old House of Lords, where we used to be huddled together like so many sheep kept in waiting, say, until the woolsack might want re-stuffing. Returning home from excited political meetings in the country to the waiting press in London, I do verily believe I have been upset in almost every description of vehicle known in this country. I have been in my time belated on miry by-roads, towards the small hours, forty or fifty miles from London, in a wheelless carriage, with exhausted horses and drunken postboys, and have got back in time for publication, to be received with never-forgotten compliments by the late Mr. Black, coming in the broadest of Scotch from the broadest of hearts I ever knew." Thus early had Dickens learnt the secret of throwing himself into any pursuit once taken up by him, and of half achieving his task by the very heartiness with which he set about it. When at the close of the parliamentary session of the year 1836 his labours as a reporter came to an end, he was held to have no equal in the gallery. During this period his naturally keen powers of observation must have been sharpened and strengthened, and that quickness of decision acquired which constitutes, perhaps, the most valuable lesson that journalistic practice of any kind can

teach to a young man of letters. To Dickens' experience as a reporter may likewise be traced no small part of his political creed, in which there was a good deal of infidelity; or at all events, his determined contempt for the parliamentary style proper, whether in the mouth of "Thisman" or of "Thatman," and his rooted dislike of the "cheap-jacks" and "national dustmen" whom he discerned among our orators and legislators. There is probably no very great number of Members of Parliament who are heroes to those who wait attendance on their words. Moreover, the period of Dickens' most active labours as a reporter was one that succeeded a time of great political excitement; and when men wish thankfully to rest after deeds, words are in season.

Meanwhile, very tentatively and with a very imperfect consciousness of the significance for himself of his first steps on a slippery path, Dickens had begun the real career of his life. It has been seen how he had been a writer as a "baby," as a schoolboy, and as a lawyer's clerk, and the time had come when, like all writers, he wished to see himself in print. In December, 1833, the *Monthly Magazine* published a paper which he had dropped into its letter-box, and with eyes "dimmed with joy and pride" the young author beheld his firstborn in print. The paper, called *A Dinner at Poplar Walk*, was afterwards reprinted in the *Sketches by Boz* under the title of *Mr. Minns and his Cousin*, and is laughable enough. His success emboldened him to send further papers of a similar character to the same magazine, which published ten contributions of his by February, 1835. That which appeared in August, 1834, was the first signed "Boz," a nickname given by him in his boyhood to a favourite brother. Since Dickens used this signature

not only as the author of the *Sketches* and a few other minor productions, but also as "editor" of the *Pickwick Papers*, it is not surprising that, especially among his admirers on the Continent and in America, the name should have clung to him so tenaciously. It was on a steamboat near Niagara that he heard from his state-room a gentleman complaining to his wife: "Boz keeps himself very close."

But the *Monthly Magazine*, though warmly welcoming its young contributor's lively sketches, could not afford to pay for them. He was therefore glad to conclude an arrangement with Mr. George Hogarth, the conductor of the *Evening Chronicle*, a paper in connexion with the great morning journal on the reporting staff of which he was engaged. He had gratuitously contributed a sketch to the evening paper as a personal favour to Mr. Hogarth, and the latter readily proposed to the proprietors of the *Morning Chronicle* that Dickens should be duly remunerated for this addition to his regular labours. With a salary of seven instead of, as heretofore, five guineas a-week, and settled in chambers in Furnival's Inn—one of those old legal inns which he loved so well—he might already in this year, 1835, consider himself on the high-road to prosperity. By the beginning of 1836 the *Sketches by Boz* printed in the *Evening Chronicle* were already numerous enough, and their success was sufficiently established to allow of his arranging for their republication. They appeared in two volumes, with woodcuts by Cruikshank, and the sum of a hundred and fifty pounds was paid to him for the copyright. The stepping-stones had been found and passed, and on the last day of March, which saw the publication of the first number of the *Pickwick Papers*, he stood in the field of fame

and fortune. Three days afterwards Dickens married Catherine Hogarth, the eldest daughter of the friend who had so efficiently aided him in his early literary ventures. Mr. George Hogarth's name thus links together the names of two masters of English fiction; for Lockhart speaks of him when a Writer to the Signet in Edinburgh as one of the intimate friends of Scott. Dickens' apprenticeship as an author was over almost as soon as it was begun; and he had found the way short from obscurity to the dazzling light of popularity. As for the *Sketches by Boz*, their author soon repurchased the copyright for more than thirteen times the sum which had been paid to him for it.

In their collected form these *Sketches* modestly described themselves as "illustrative of every-day life and every-day people." Herein they only prefigured the more famous creations of their writer, whose genius was never so happy as when lighting up, now the humorous, now what he chose to term the romantic side of familiar things. The curious will find little difficulty in tracing in these outlines, often rough and at times coarse, the groundwork of more than one finished picture of later date. Not a few of the most peculiar features of Dickens humour are already here, together with not a little of his most characteristic pathos. It is true that in these early *Sketches* the latter is at times strained, but its power is occasionally beyond denial, as, for instance, in the brief narrative of the death of the hospital patient. On the other hand, the humour—more especially that of the *Tales*—is not of the most refined sort, and often degenerates in the direction of boisterous farce. The style, too, though in general devoid of the pretentiousness which is the bane of "light" journalistic writing, has

a taint of vulgarity about it, very pardonable under the circumstances, but generally absent from Dickens' later works. Weak puns are not unfrequent; and the diction but rarely reaches that exquisite felicity of comic phrase in which *Pickwick* and its successors excel. For the rest, Dickens' favourite passions and favourite aversions alike reflect themselves here in small. In the description of the Election for Beadle he ridicules the tricks and the manners of political party-life, and his love of things theatrical has its full freshness upon it,—however he may pretend at Astley's that his "histrionic taste is gone," and that it is the audience which chiefly delights him. But of course the gift which these *Sketches* pre-eminently revealed in their author was a descriptive power that seemed to lose sight of nothing characteristic in the object described, and of nothing humorous in an association suggested by it. Whether his theme was street or river, a Christmas dinner or the extensive groves of the illustrious dead (the old clothes' shops in Monmouth Street), he reproduced it in all its shades and colours, and under a hundred aspects, fanciful as well as real. How inimitable, for instance, is the sketch of "the last cab-driver, and the first omnibus cad," whose earlier vehicle, the omnipresent "red cab," was not the gondola, but the very fire-ship of the London streets.

Dickens himself entertained no high opinion of these youthful efforts; and in this he showed the consciousness of the true artist, that masterpieces are rarely thrown off at hazard. But though much of the popularity of the *Sketches* may be accounted for by the fact that commonplace people love to read about commonplace people and things, the greater part of it is due to genuine literary merit. The days of half-price in theatres have followed the

days of coaching; "Honest Tom" no more paces the lobby in a black coat with velvet facings and cuffs, and a D'Orsay hat; the Hickses of the present time no longer quote "Don Juan" over boarding-house dinner-tables; and the young ladies in Camberwell no longer compare young men in attitudes to Lord Byron, or to "Satan" Montgomery. But the *Sketches by Boz* have survived their birth-time; and they deserve to be remembered among the rare instances in which a young author has no sooner begun to write, than he has shown a knowledge of his real strength. As yet, however, this sudden favourite of the public was unaware of the range to which his powers were to extend, and of the height to which they were to mount.

CHAPTER II.

FROM SUCCESS TO SUCCESS.

1836—1841.

Even in those years of which the record is brightest in the story of his life, Charles Dickens, like the rest of the world, had his share of troubles—troubles great and small, losses which went home to his heart, and vexations manifold in the way of business. But in the history of his early career as an author, the word failure has no place.

Not that the *Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club*, published as they were in monthly numbers, at once took the town by storm; for the public needed two or three months to make up its mind that "Boz" was equal to an effort considerably in advance of his *Sketches*. But when the popularity of the serial was once established, it grew with extraordinary rapidity until it reached an altogether unprecedented height. He would be a bold man who should declare that its popularity has very materially diminished at the present day. Against the seductions of *Pickwick* and of other works of amusement of which it was the prototype, Dr. Arnold thought himself bound seriously to contend among the boys of Rugby; and twenty years later young men at the university talked nothing but *Pickwick*, and quoted nothing but *Pickwick*, and the wittiest of undergraduates set the world at large

an examination paper in *Pickwick*, over which pretentious half-knowledge may puzzle, unable accurately to "describe the common Profeel-machine," or to furnish a satisfactory definition of "a red-faced Nixon." No changes in manners and customs have interfered with the hold of the work upon nearly all classes of readers at home; and no translation has been dull enough to prevent its being relished even in countries where all English manners and customs must seem equally uninteresting or equally absurd.

So extraordinary has been the popularity of this more than thrice fortunate book, that the wildest legends have grown up as to the history of its origin. The facts, however, as stated by Dickens himself, are few and plain. Attracted by the success of the *Sketches*, Messrs. Chapman and Hall proposed to him that he should write "something" in monthly numbers to serve as a vehicle for certain plates to be executed by the comic draughtsman, Mr. R. Seymour; and either the publishers or the artist suggested as a kind of leading notion, the idea of a "Nimrod Club" of unlucky sportsmen. The proposition was at Dickens' suggestion so modified that the plates were "to arise naturally out of the text," the range of the latter being left open to him. This explains why the rather artificial machinery of a club was maintained, and why Mr. Winkle's misfortunes by flood and field hold their place by the side of the philanthropical meanderings of Mr. Pickwick and the amorous experiences of Mr. Tupman. An original was speedily found for the pictorial presentment of the hero of the book, and a felicitous name for him soon suggested itself. Only a single number of the serial had appeared when Mr. Seymour's own hand put an end to his life. It is well known that among the applicants for the vacant office of illustrator of the *Pickwick*

Papers was Thackeray—the senior of Dickens by a few months—whose style as a draughtsman would have been singularly unsuited to the adventures and the gaiters of Mr. Pickwick. Finally, in no altogether propitious hour for some of Dickens' books, Mr. Hablot Browne ("Phiz") was chosen as illustrator. Some happy hits—such as the figure of Mr. Micawber—apart, the illustrations of Dickens by this artist, though often both imaginative and effective, are apt, on the one hand, to obscure the author's fidelity to nature, and on the other, to intensify his unreality. *Oliver Twist*, like the *Sketches*, was illustrated by George Cruikshank, a pencil humourist of no common calibre, but as a rule ugly with the whole virtuous intention of his heart. Dickens himself was never so well satisfied with any illustrator as with George Cattermole (*alias* "Kittenmoles"), a connexion of his by marriage, who co-operated with Hablot Browne in *Master Humphrey's Clock*; in his latest works he resorted to the aid of younger artists, whose reputation has since justified his confidence. The most congenial of the pictorial interpreters of Dickens, in his brightest and freshest humour, was his valued friend John Leech, whose services, together occasionally with those of Doyle, Frank Stone, and Tenniel, as well as of his faithful Stanfield and Maclise, he secured for his Christmas books.

The *Pickwick Papers*, of which the issue was completed by the end of 1837, brought in to Dickens a large sum of money, and after a time a handsome annual income. On the whole this has remained the most general favourite of all his books. Yet it is not for this reason only that *Pickwick* defies criticism, but also because the circumstances under

which the book was begun and carried on make it preposterous to judge it by canons applicable to its author's subsequent fictions. As the serial proceeded, the interest which was to be divided between the inserted tales, some of which have real merit, and the framework, was absorbed by the latter. The rise in the style of the book can almost be measured by the change in the treatment of its chief character, Mr. Pickwick himself. In a later preface, Dickens endeavoured to illustrate this change by the analogy of real life. The truth of course is, that it was only as the author proceeded that he recognised the capabilities of the character, and his own power of making it, and his book with it, truly loveable as well as laughable. Thus, on the very same page in which Mr. Pickwick proves himself a true gentleman in his leave-taking from Mr. Nupkins, there follows a little bit of the idyll between Sam and the pretty housemaid, written with a delicacy that could hardly have been suspected in the chronicler of the experiences of Miss Jemima Evans or of Mr. Augustus Cooper. In the subsequent part of the main narrative will be found exemplified nearly all the varieties of pathos of which Dickens was afterwards so repeatedly to prove himself master, more especially of course in those prison scenes for which some of our older novelists may have furnished him with hints. Even that subtle species of humour is not wanting which is content to miss its effect with the less attentive reader; as in this passage concerning the ruined cobbler's confidences to Sam in the Fleet:

> The cobbler paused to ascertain what effect his story had produced on Sam; but finding that he had dropped asleep, knocked the ashes out of his pipe, *sighed*, put it down, drew the bedclothes over his head, and went to sleep too.

Goldsmith himself could not have put more of pathos and more of irony into a single word.

But it may seem out of place to dwell upon details such as this in view of the broad and universally acknowledged comic effects of this masterpiece of English humour. Its many genuinely comic characters are as broadly marked as the heroes of the least refined of sporting novels, and as true to nature as the most elaborated products of Addison's art. The author's humour is certainly not one which eschews simple in favour of subtle means, or which is averse from occasional desipience in the form of the wildest farce. Mrs. Leo Hunter's garden party—or rather "public breakfast"—at The Den, Eatanswill; Mr. Pickwick's nocturnal descent, through three gooseberry bushes and a rose-tree, upon the virgin soil of Miss Tomkins' establishment for young ladies; the *supplice d'un homme* of Mr. Pott; Mr. Weller junior's love-letter, with notes and comments by Mr. Weller senior, and Mr. Weller senior's own letter of affliction written by somebody else; the footmen's "swarry" at Bath, and Mr. Bob Sawyer's bachelors' party in the Borough;—all these and many other scenes and passages have in them that jovial element of exaggeration which nobody mistakes and nobody resents. Whose duty is it to check the volubility of Mr. Alfred Jingle, or to weigh the heaviness, *quot libras*, of the Fat Boy? Everyone is conscious of the fact that in the contagious high spirits of the author lies one of the chief charms of the book. Not, however, that the effect produced is obtained without the assistance of a very vigilant art. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the character which is upon the whole the most brilliant of the many brilliant additions which the author made to his original group of

personages. If there is nothing so humorous in the book as Sam Weller, neither is there in it anything more pathetic than the relation between him and his master. As for Sam Weller's style of speech, scant justice was done to it by Mr. Pickwick when he observed to Job Trotter, "my man is in the right, although his mode of expressing his opinion is somewhat homely, and occasionally incomprehensible." The fashion of Sam's gnomic philosophy is at least as old as Theocritus;[1] but the special impress which he has given to it is his own, rudely foreshadowed perhaps in some of the apophthegms of his father. Incidental Sam Wellerisms in *Oliver Twist* and *Nicholas Nickleby* show how enduring a hold the whimsical fancy had taken of its creator. For the rest, the freshness of the book continues the same to the end; and farcical as are some of the closing scenes—those, for instance, in which a chorus of coachmen attends the movements of the elder Mr. Weller—there is even here no straining after effect. An exception might perhaps be found in the catastrophe of the Shepherd, which is coarsely contrived; but the fun of the character is in itself neither illegitimate nor unwholesome. It will be observed below that it is the constant harping on the same string, the repeated picturing of professional preachers of religion as gross and greasy scoundrels, which in the end becomes offensive in Dickens.

On the whole, no hero has ever more appropriately bidden farewell to his labours than Mr. Pickwick in the words which he uttered at the table of the ever-hospitable Mr. Wardle at the Adelphi.

[1] See *Idyll.* xv. 77. This discovery is not my own, but that of the late Dr. Donaldson, who used to translate the passage accordingly with great gusto.

"I shall never regret," said Mr. Pickwick in a low voice, "I shall never regret having devoted the greater part of two years to mixing with different varieties and shades of human character; frivolous as my pursuit of novelty may appear to many. Nearly the whole of my previous life having been devoted to business and the pursuit of wealth, numerous scenes of which I had no previous conception have dawned upon me—I hope to the enlargement of my mind, and to the improvement of my understanding. If I have done but little good, I trust I have done less harm, and that none of my adventures will be other than a source of amusing and pleasant recollection to me in the decline of life. God bless you all."

Of course Mr. Pickwick "filled and drained a bumper" to the sentiment. Indeed, it "snoweth" in this book "of meat and drink." Wine, ale, and brandy abound there, and viands to which ample justice is invariably done—even under Mr. Tupman's heartrending circumstances at the (now, alas! degenerate) Leather Bottle. Something of this is due to the times in which the work was composed, and to the class of readers for which we may suppose it in the first instance to have been intended; but Dickens, though a temperate man, loved the paraphernalia of good cheer, besides cherishing the associations which are inseparable from it. At the same time, there is a little too much of it in the *Pickwick Papers*, however well its presence may consort with the geniality which pervades them. It is difficult to turn any page of the book without chancing on one of those supremely felicitous phrases in the ready mintage of which Dickens at all times excelled. But its chief attraction lies in the spirit of the whole—that spirit of true humour, which calls forth at once merriment, good will, and charity.

In the year 1836, which the commencement of the *Pickwick Papers* has made memorable in the history of English literature, Dickens was already in the full tide of

authorship. In February, 1837, the second number of *Bentley's Miscellany*, a new monthly magazine which he had undertaken to edit, contained the opening chapters of his story of *Oliver Twist*. Shortly before this, in September and December, 1836, he had essayed two of the least ambitious branches of dramatic authorship. The acting of Harley, an admirable dry comedian, gave some vitality to *The Strange Gentleman*, a "comic burletta," or farce, in two acts, founded upon the tale in the *Sketches* called *The Great Winglebury Duel*. It ran for seventy nights at Drury Lane, and, in its author's opinion, was "the best thing Harley did." But the adaptation has no special feature distinguishing it from the original, unless it be the effective bustle of the opening. *The Village Coquettes*, an operetta represented at the St. James's Theatre, with music by Hullah, was an equally unpretending effort. In this piece Harley took one part, that of "a very small farmer with a very large circle of intimate friends," and John Parry made his *début* on the London stage in another. To quote any of the songs in this operetta would be very unfair to Dickens.[1] He was not at all depressed by the unfavourable criticisms which were passed upon his libretto, and against which he had to set the round declaration of Braham, that there had been "no such music since the days of Shield, and no such piece since *The Duenna*." As time went on, however, he became anything but proud of his juvenile productions as a dramatist, and strongly objected to their revival. His third and last attempt of this kind,

[1] For operas, as a form of *dramatic* entertainment, Dickens seems afterwards to have entertained a strong contempt, such as, indeed, it is difficult for any man with a sense of humour wholly to avoid.

a farce called *The Lamplighter*, which he wrote for Covent Garden in 1838, was never acted, having been withdrawn by Macready's wish; and in 1841 Dickens converted it into a story printed among the *Pic-Nic Papers*, a collection generously edited by him for the benefit of the widow and children of a publisher towards whom he had little cause for personal gratitude. His friendship for Macready kept alive in him for some time the desire to write a comedy worthy of so distinguished an actor; and, according to his wont, he had even chosen beforehand for the piece a name which he was not to forget—*No Thoroughfare*. But the genius of the age, an influence which is often stronger than personal wishes or inclinations, diverted him from dramatic composition. He would have been equally unwilling to see mentioned among his literary works the *Life of Grimaldi*, which he merely edited, and which must be numbered among forgotten memorials of forgotten greatness.

To the earlier part of 1838 belong one or two other publications, which their author never cared to reprint. The first of these, however, a short pamphlet entitled *Sunday under Three Heads*, is not without a certain biographical interest. This little book was written with immediate reference to a bill "for the better observance of the Sabbath," which the House of Commons had recently thrown out by a small majority; and its special purpose was the advocacy of Sunday excursions, and harmless Sunday amusements, in lieu of the alternate gloom and drunkenness distinguishing what Dickens called a London *Sunday as it is*. His own love of fresh air and brightness intensified his hatred of a formalism which shuts its ears to argument. In the powerful picture of a Sunday evening in London, "gloomy, close, and stale,"

which he afterwards drew in *Little Dorrit*, he almost seems to hold Sabbatarianism and the weather responsible for one another. When he afterwards saw a Parisian Sunday, he thought it "not comfortable," so that, like others who hate bigotry, he may perhaps have come to recognise the difficulty of arranging an English *Sunday as it might be made*. On the other hand, he may have remembered his youthful fancy of the good clergyman encouraging a game of cricket after church, when thirty years later, writing from Edinburgh, he playfully pictured the counterpart of *Sunday as Sabbath bills would have it*: describing how "the usual preparations are making for the band in the open air in the afternoon, and the usual pretty children (selected for that purpose), are at this moment hanging garlands round the Scott monument preparatory to the innocent Sunday dance round that edifice, with which the diversions invariably close." The *Sketches of Young Gentlemen*, published in the same year, are little if at all in advance of the earlier *Sketches by Boz*, and were evidently written to order. He finished them in precisely a fortnight, and noted in his diary that "one hundred and twenty-five pounds for such a book, without any name to it, is pretty well." The *Sketches of Young Couples*, which followed as late as 1840, have the advantage of a facetious introduction, suggested by Her Majesty's own announcement of her approaching marriage. But the life has long gone out of these pleasantries, as it has from others of the same cast, in which many a mirthful spirit, forced to coin its mirth into money, has ere now spent itself.

It was the better fortune of Dickens to be able almost from the first to keep nearly all his writings on a level with his powers. He never made a bolder step forwards

than when, in the very midst of the production of *Pickwick*, he began his first long continuous story, the *Adventures of Oliver Twist*. Those who have looked at the MS. of this famous novel will remember the vigour of the handwriting, and how few, in comparison with his later MSS., are the additions and obliterations which it exhibits. But here and there the writing shows traces of excitement; for the author's heart was in his work, and much of it, contrary to his later habit, was written at night. No doubt he was upheld in the labour of authorship by something besides ambition and consciousness of strength. *Oliver Twist* was certainly written *with a purpose*, and with one that was afterwards avowed. The author intended to put before his readers—"so long as their speech did not offend the ear"—a picture of "dregs of life," hitherto, as he believed, never exhibited by any novelist in their loathsome reality. Yet the old masters of fiction, Fielding in particular, as well as the old master of the brush whom Dickens cites (Hogarth), had not shrunk from the path which their disciple now essayed. Dickens, however, was naturally thinking of his own generation, which had already relished *Paul Clifford*, and which was not to be debarred from exciting itself over *Jack Sheppard*, begun before *Oliver Twist* had been completed, and in the selfsame magazine. Dickens' purpose was an honest and a praiseworthy one. But the most powerful and at the same time the most loveable element in his genius suggested the silver lining to the cloud. To that unfailing power of sympathy which was the mainspring of both his most affecting and his most humorous touches, we owe the redeeming features in his company of criminals; not only the devotion and the heroism of Nancy, but the irresistible vivacity of the Artful Dodger,

and the good-humour of Charley Bates, which moved Talfourd to "plead as earnestly in mitigation of judgment" against him as ever he had done "at the bar for any client he most respected." Other parts of the story were less carefully tempered. Mr. Fang, the police-magistrate, appears to have been a rather hasty portrait of a living original; and the whole picture of Bumble and Bumbledom was certainly a caricature of the working of the new Poor-Law, confounding the question of its merits and demerits with that of its occasional maladministration. On the other hand, a vein of truest pathos runs through the whole of poor Nancy's story, and adds to the effect of a marvellously powerful catastrophe. From Nancy's interview with Rose at London Bridge to the closing scenes, the flight of Sikes, his death at Jacob's Island, and the end of the Jew, the action has an intensity rare in the literature of the terrible. By the side of this genuine tragic force, which perhaps it would be easiest to parallel from some of the "low" domestic tragedy of the Elizabethans, the author's comic humour burst forth upon the world in a variety of entirely new types: Bumble and his partner; Noah Claypole, complete in himself, but full of promise for Uriah Heep; and the Jew, with all the pupils and supporters of his establishment of technical education. Undeniably the story of *Oliver Twist* also contains much that is artificial and stilted, with much that is weak and (the author of *Endymion* is to be thanked for the word) "gushy." Thus, all the Maylie scenes, down to the last in which Oliver discreetly "glides" away from the lovers, are barely endurable. But, whatever its shortcomings, *Oliver Twist* remains an almost unique example of a young author's brilliant success in an enterprise of complete novelty and extreme difficulty.

Some of its situations continue to exercise their power even over readers already familiarly acquainted with them; and some of its characters will live by the side of Dickens' happiest and most finished creations. Even had a sapient critic been right who declared during the progress of the story, that Mr. Dickens appeared to have worked out "the particular vein of humour which had hitherto yielded so much attractive metal," it would have been worked out to some purpose. After making his readers merry with *Pickwick*, he had thrilled them with *Oliver Twist*; and by the one book as by the other, he had made them think better of mankind.

But neither had his vein been worked out, nor was his hand content with a single task. In April, 1838, several months before the completion of *Oliver Twist*, the first number of *Nicholas Nickleby* appeared; and while engaged upon the composition of these books he contributed to *Bentley's Miscellany*, of which he retained the editorship till the early part of 1839, several smaller articles. Of these, the *Mudfog Papers* have been recently thought worth reprinting; but even supposing the satire against the Association for the Advancement of Everything to have not yet altogether lost its savour, the fun of the day before yesterday refuses to be revived. *Nicholas Nickleby*, published in twenty numbers, was the labour of many months, but was produced under so great a press of work that during the whole time of publication Dickens was never a single number in advance. Yet, though not one of the most perfect of his books, it is indisputably one of the most thoroughly original, and signally illustrates the absurdity of recent attempts to draw a distinction between the imaginative romance of the past and the realistic novel of

the present. Dickens was never so strong as when he produced from the real; and in this instance,—starting, no doubt, with a healthy prejudice,—so carefully had he inspected the neighbourhood of the Yorkshire schools, of which Dotheboys Hall was to be held up as the infamous type, that there seems to be no difficulty in identifying the site of the very school itself; while the Portsmouth Theatre is to the full as accurate a study as the Yorkshire school. So, again, as everyone knows, the Brothers Cheeryble were real personages well known in Manchester,[1] where even the original of Tim Linkinwater still survives in local remembrance. On the other hand, with how conscious a strength has the author's imaginative power used and transmuted his materials: in the Squeers family, creating a group of inimitable grotesqueness; in their humblest victim Smike giving one of his earliest pictures of those outcasts whom he drew again and again with such infinite tenderness; and in Mr. Vincent Crummles and his company, including the Phenomenon, establishing a jest, but a kindly one, for all times! In a third series of episodes in this book, it is universally agreed that the author has no less conspicuously failed. Dickens' first attempt to picture the manners and customs of the aristocracy certainly resulted in portraying some very peculiar people. Lord Frederick Verisopht, indeed—who is allowed to redeem his character in the end—is not without touches resembling nature.

"I take an interest, my lord," said Mrs. Wititterly, with a faint smile; "such an interest in the drama."

"Ye-es. It's very interasting," replied Lord Frederick.

"I'm always ill after Shakespeare," said Mrs. Wititterly, "I

[1] W. and D. Grant Brothers had their warehouse at the lower end of Cannon Street, and their private house in Mosely Street.

scarcely exist the next day; I find the reaction so very great after a tragedy, my lord, and Shakespeare is such a delicious creature."

"Ye-es!" replied Lord Frederick. "He was a clayver man."

But Sir Mulberry Hawk is a kind of scoundrel not frequently met with in polite society; his henchmen Pluck and Pyke have the air of "followers of Don John," and the enjoyments of the "trainers of young noblemen and gentlemen" at Hampton races, together with the riotous debauch which precedes the catastrophe, seem taken direct from the transpontine stage. The fact is that Dickens was here content to draw his vile seducers and wicked orgies, just as commonplace writers had drawn them a thousand times before, and will draw them a thousand times again. Much of the hero's talk is of the same conventional kind. On the other hand, nothing could be more genuine than the flow of fun in this book, which finds its outlet in the most unexpected channels, but nowhere so resistlessly as in the invertebrate talk of Mrs. Nickleby. For her Forster discovered a literary prototype in a character of Miss Austen's; but even if Mrs. Nickleby was founded on Miss Bates, in *Emma*, she left her original far behind. Miss Bates, indeed, is verbose, roundabout, and parenthetic; but the widow never deviates into coherence.

Nicholas Nickleby shows the comic genius of its author in full activity, and should be read with something of the buoyancy of spirit in which it was written, and not with a callousness capable of seeing in so amusing a scamp as Mr. Mantalini one of Dickens' "monstrous failures." At the same time this book displays the desire of the author to mould his manner on the old models. The very title has a savour of Smollett about it; the style has more than one reminiscence of him, as well as of Fielding

and of Goldsmith; and the general method of the narrative resembles that of our old novelists and their Spanish and French predecessors. Partly for this reason, and partly, no doubt, because of the rapidity with which the story was written, its construction is weaker than is usual even with Dickens' earlier works. Coincidences are repeatedly employed to help on the action; and the *dénoûment*, which, besides turning Mr. Squeers into a thief, reveals Ralph Nickleby as the father of Smike, is oppressively complete. As to the practical aim of the novel, the author's word must be taken for the fact that "Mr. Squeers and his school were faint and feeble pictures of an existing reality, purposely subdued and kept down lest they should be deemed impossible." The exposure, no doubt, did good in its way, though perhaps Mr. Squeers, in a more or less modified form, has proved a tougher adversary to overcome than Mrs. Gamp.

During these years Dickens was chiefly resident in the modest locality of Doughty Street, whither he had moved his household from the "three rooms," "three storeys high," in Furnival's Inn, early in 1837. It was not till the end of 1839 that he took up his abode, further west, in a house which he came to like best among all his London habitations, in Devonshire Terrace, Regent's Park. His town life was, however, varied by long rustications at Twickenham and at Petersham, and by sojourns at the seaside, of which he was a most consistent votary. He is found in various years of his life at Brighton, Dover, and Bonchurch—where he liked his neighbours better than he liked the climate; and in later years, when he had grown accustomed to the Continent, he repeatedly domesticated himself at Boulogne. But already in 1837 he had discovered the little seaside village, as it then

was, which for many years afterwards became his favourite holiday retreat, and of which he would be the *genius loci*, even if he had not by a special description immortalised *Our English Watering-place*. Broadstairs—whose afternoon tranquillity even to this day is undisturbed except by the Ethiopians on their tramp from Margate to Ramsgate—and its constant visitor, are thus described in a letter written to an American friend in 1843: "This is a little fishing-place; intensely quiet; built on a cliff, whereon—in the centre of a tiny semicircular bay—our house stands; the sea rolling and dashing under the windows. Seven miles out are the Goodwin Sands (you've heard of the Goodwin Sands?) whence floating lights perpetually wink after dark, as if they were carrying on intrigues with the servants. Also there is a big lighthouse called the North Foreland on a hill behind the village, a severe parsonic light, which reproves the young and giddy floaters, and stares grimly out upon the sea. Under the cliff are rare good sands, where all the children assemble every morning and throw up impossible fortifications, which the sea throws down again at high water. Old gentlemen and ancient ladies flirt after their own manner in two reading-rooms and on a great many scattered seats in the open air. Other old gentlemen look all day through telescopes and never see anything. In a bay-window in a one-pair sits, from nine o'clock to one, a gentleman with rather long hair and no neckcloth, who writes and grins, as if he thought he were very funny indeed. His name is Boz."

Not a few houses at Broadstairs may boast of having been at one time or another inhabited by him and his. Of the long-desired Fort House, however, which local perverseness triumphantly points out as the original of

Bleak House (no part even of *Bleak House* was written there, though part of *David Copperfield* was), he could not obtain possession till 1850. As like Bleak House as it is like Chesney Wold, it stands at the very highest end of the place, looking straight out to sea, over the little harbour and its two colliers, with a pleasant stretch of cornfields leading along the cliff towards the lighthouse which Dickens promised Lord Carlisle should serve him as a night-light. But in 1837 Dickens was content with narrower quarters. The "long small procession of sons" and daughters had as yet only begun with the birth of his eldest boy. His life was simple and full of work, and occasional seaside or country quarters, and now and then a brief holiday tour, afforded the necessary refreshment of change. In 1837 he made his first short trip abroad, and in the following year, accompanied by Mr. Hablot Browne, he spent a week of enjoyment in Warwickshire, noting in his *Remembrancer:* "Stratford; Shakespeare; the birth-place; visitors, scribblers, old woman (query whether she knows what Shakespeare did), etc." Meanwhile, among his truest home enjoyments were his friendships. They were few in number, mostly with men for whom, after he had once taken them into his heart, he preserved a lifelong regard. Chief of all these were John Forster and Daniel Maclise, the high-minded painter, to whom we owe a charming portrait of his friend in this youthful period of his life. Losing them, he afterwards wrote when absent from England, was "like losing my arms and legs, and dull and tame I am without you." Besides these, he was at this time on very friendly terms with William Harrison Ainsworth, who succeeded him in the editorship of the *Miscellany*, and concerning whom he exclaimed in his *Remembrancer:* "Ainsworth has a fine heart." At the

close of 1838, Dickens, Ainsworth, and Forster constituted themselves a club called the Trio, and afterwards the Cerberus. Another name frequent in the *Remembrancer* entries is that of Talfourd, a generous friend, in whom, as Dickens finely said after his death, "the success of other men made as little change as his own." All these, together with Stanfield, the Landseers, Douglas Jerrold, Macready, and others less known to fame, were among the friends and associates of Dickens' prime. The letters, too, remaining from this part of Dickens' life, have all the same tone of unaffected frankness. With some of his intimate friends he had his established epistolary jokes. Stanfield, the great marine painter, he pertinaciously treated as a "very salt" correspondent, communications to whom, as to a "block-reeving, main-brace-splicing, lead-heaving, ship-conning, stun'sail-bending, deck-swabbing son of a sea-cook," needed garnishing with the obscurest technicalities and strangest oaths of his element. (It is touching to turn from these friendly buffooneries to a letter written by Dickens many years afterwards—in 1867—and mentioning a visit to "poor dear Stanfield," when "it was clear that the shadow of the end had fallen on him. . . . It happened well that I had seen, on a wild day at Tynemouth, a remarkable sea effect, of which I wrote a description to him, and he had kept it under his pillow.") Macready, after his retirement from the stage, is bantered on the score of his juvenility with a pertinacity of fun recalling similar whimsicalities of Charles Lamb's; or the jest is changed, and the great London actor in his rural retreat is depicted in the character of a country gentleman strange to the wicked ways of the town. As in the case of many delightful letter-writers, the charm of Dickens as a correspondent vanishes so soon as he becomes self-

conscious. Even in his letters to Lady Blessington and Mrs. Watson, a striving after effect is at times perceptible; the homage rendered to Lord John Russell is not offered with a light hand; on the contrary, when writing to Douglas Jerrold, Dickens is occasionally so intent upon proving himself a sound Radical that his vehemence all but passes into a shriek.

In these early years, at all events, Dickens was happy in the society of his chosen friends. His favourite amusements were a country walk or ride with Forster, or a dinner at Jack Straw's Castle with him and Maclise. He was likewise happy at home. Here, however, in the very innermost circle of his affections, he had to suffer the first great personal grief of his life. His younger sister-in-law, Miss Mary Hogarth, had accompanied him and his wife into their new abode in Doughty Street, and here, in May, 1837, she died, at the early age of seventeen. No sorrow seems ever to have touched the heart and possessed the imagination of Charles Dickens like that for the loss of this dearly-loved girl, "young, beautiful, and good." "I can solemnly say," he wrote to her mother a few months after her death, "that, waking or sleeping, I have never lost the recollection of our hard trial and sorrow, and I feel that I never shall." "If," ran part of his first entry in the Diary which he began on the first day of the following year, "she were with us now, the same winning, happy, amiable companion, sympathising with all my thoughts and feelings more than anyone I knew ever did or will, I think I should have nothing to wish for but a continuance of such happiness. But she is gone, and pray God I may one day, through His mercy, rejoin her." It was not till, in after years, it became necessary to abandon the project, that he

ceased to cherish the intention of being buried by her side, and through life the memory of her haunted him with strange vividness. At the Niagara Falls, when the spectacle of Nature in her glory had produced in him, as he describes it, a wondrously tranquil and happy peace of mind, he longed for the presence of his dearest friends, and "I was going to add, what would I give if the dear girl, whose ashes lie in Kensal Green, had lived to come so far along with us; but she has been here many times, I doubt not, since her sweet face faded from my earthly sight." "After she died," he wrote to her mother in May, 1843, "I dreamed of her every night for many weeks, and always with a kind of quiet happiness, which became so pleasant to me that I never lay down at night without a hope of the vision coming back in one shape or other. And so it did." Once he dreamt of her, when travelling in Yorkshire; and then, after an interval of many months, as he lay asleep one night at Genoa, it seemed to him as if her spirit visited him and spoke to him in words which he afterwards precisely remembered, when he had awaked, with the tears running down his face. He never forgot her, and in the year before he died, he wrote to his friend: "She is so much in my thoughts at all times, especially when I am successful, and have greatly prospered in anything, that the recollection of her is an essential part of my being, and is as inseparable from my existence as the beating of my heart is!" In a word, she was the object of the one great imaginative passion of his life. Many have denied that there is any likeness to nature in the fictitious figure in which, according to the wont of imaginative workers, he was irresistibly impelled to embody the sentiment with which she inspired him; but the sentiment itself became part of his nature, and part of his history.

When in writing the *Old Curiosity Shop* he approached the death of Little Nell, he shrank from the task. "Dear Mary died yesterday, when I think of this sad story."

The *Old Curiosity Shop* has long been freed from the encumbrances which originally surrounded it, and there is little except biographical interest in the half-forgotten history of *Master Humphrey's Clock.* Early in the year 1840, his success and confidence in his powers induced him to undertake an illustrated weekly journal, in which he depended solely on his own name, and, in the first instance, on his own efforts, as a writer. Such was his trust in his versatility, that he did not think it necessary even to open with a continuous story. Perhaps the popularity of the *Pickwick Papers* encouraged him to adopt the time-honoured device of wrapping up several tales in one. In any case, his framework was in the present instance too elaborate to take hold of the public mind, while the characters introduced into it possessed little or nothing of the freshness of their models in the *Tatler* and the *Spectator.* In order to reinforce Master Humphrey, the deaf gentleman, and the other original members of his benevolent conclave, he hereupon resorted to a natural, but none the less unhappy, expedient. Mr. Pickwick was revived, together with Sam Weller and his parent; and a Weller of the third generation was brought on the stage in the person of a precocious four-year-old, "standing with his little legs very wide apart as if the top-boots were familiar to them, and actually winking upon the housekeeper with his infant eye, in imitation of his grandfather." A laugh may have been raised at the time by this attempt, from which, however, every true Pickwickian must have turned sadly away. Nor was there much in the other contents of these early numbers to make up for the dis-

appointment. As therefore neither "Master Humphrey's Clock" nor "Mr. Weller's Watch" seemed to promise any lasting success, it was prudently determined that the story of the *Old Curiosity Shop*, of which the first portion had appeared in the fourth number of the periodical, should run on continuously; and when this had been finished, a very short "link" sufficed to introduce another story, *Barnaby Rudge*, with the close of which *Master Humphrey's Clock* likewise stopped.

In the *Old Curiosity Shop*, though it abounds in both grotesquely terrible and boisterously laughable effects, the keynote is that of an idyllic pathos. The sense of this takes hold of the reader at the very outset, as he lingers over the picture, with which the first chapter concludes, of little Nell asleep through the solitary night in the curiosity-dealer's warehouse. It retains possession of him as he accompanies the innocent heroine through her wanderings, pausing with her in the churchyard where all is quiet save the cawing of the satirical rooks, or in the schoolmaster's cottage by the open window, through which is borne upon the evening air the distant hum of the boys at play upon the green, while the poor schoolmaster holds in his hand the small cold one of the little scholar that has fallen asleep. Nor is it absent to the last when Nell herself lies at rest in her little bed. "Her little bird—a poor slight thing the pressure of a finger would have crushed—was stirring nimbly in its cage; and the strong heart of its child-mistress was mute and motionless for ever." The hand which drew Little Nell afterwards formed other figures not less affecting, but none so essentially poetic. Like many such characters, this requires, for its full appreciation, a certain tension of the mind; and those who will not, or cannot, pass in some

measure out of themselves, will be likely to tire of the conception, or to declare its execution artificial. Curiously enough, not only was Little Nell a favourite of Landor, a poet and critic utterly averse from meretricious art, but she also deeply moved the sympathy of Lord Jeffrey, who at least knew his own mind, and spoke it in both praise and blame. As already stated, Dickens only with difficulty brought himself to carry his story to its actual issue, though it is hard to believe that he could ever have intended a different close from that which he gave to it. His whole heart was in the story, nor could he have consoled himself by means of an ordinary happy ending.

Dickens' comic humour never flowed in a pleasanter vein than in the *Old Curiosity Shop*, and nowhere has it a more exquisite element of pathos in it. The shock-headed, red-cheeked Kit is one of the earliest of those ungainly figures who speedily find their way into our affections—the odd family to which Mr. Toots, Tom Pinch, Tommy Traddles, and Joe Gargery alike belong. But the triumph of this serio-comic form of art in the *Old Curiosity Shop* is to be found in the later experiences of Dick Swiveller, who seems at first merely a more engaging sample of the Bob Sawyer species, but who ends by endearing himself to the most thoughtless laugher. Dick Swiveller and his protegee have gained a lasting place among the favourite characters of English fiction, and the privations of the Marchioness have possibly had a result which would have been that most coveted by Dickens—that of helping towards the better treatment of a class whose lot is among the dust and ashes, too often very bitter ashes, of many households. Besides these, the story contains a variety of incidental characters of a class which Dickens never grew weary of drawing from the life. Messrs. Codlin, Short, and

Company, and the rest of the itinerant showmen, seem to have come straight from the most real of country fairs; and if ever a *troupe* of comedians deserved pity on their wanderings through a callous world, it was the most diverting and the most dismal of all the mountebanks that gathered round the stew of tripe in the kitchen of The Jolly Sandboys—Jerry's performing dogs.

"Your people don't usually travel in character, do they?" said Short, pointing to the dresses of the dogs. "It must come expensive if they do."

"No," replied Jerry, "no, it's not the custom with us. But we've been playing a little on the road to-day, and we come out with a new wardrobe at the races, so I didn't think it worth while to stop to undress. Down, Pedro!"

In addition to these public servants we have a purveyor of diversion—or instruction—of an altogether different stamp. "Does the caravan look as if *it* know'd em?" indignantly demands the proprietress of Jarley's waxwork, when asked whether she is acquainted with the men of the Punch show. She too is drawn, or moulded, in the author's most exuberant style of fun, together with *her* company, in which "all the gentlemen were very pigeon-breasted and very blue about the beards, and all the ladies were miraculous figures; and all the ladies and all the gentlemen were looking intensely nowhere, and staring with extraordinary earnestness at nothing."

In contrast with these genial products of observation and humour stand the grotesquely hideous personages who play important parts in the machinery of the story, the vicious dwarf Quilp and the monstrous virago Sally Brass. The former is among the most successful attempts of Dickens in a direction which was full of danger for him, as it is for all writers; the malevolent

little demon is so blended with his surroundings—the description of which forms one of the author's most telling pictures of the lonely foulnesses of the riverside, —that his life seems natural in its way, and his death a most appropriate ending to it. Sally Brass, "whose accomplishments were all of a masculine and strictly legal kind," is less of a caricature, and not without a humorously redeeming point of feminine weakness; yet the end of her and her brother is described at the close of the book with almost tragic earnestness. On the whole, though the poetic sympathy of Dickens when he wrote this book was absorbed in the character of his heroine, yet his genius rarely asserted itself after a more diversified fashion.

Of *Barnaby Rudge*, though in my opinion an excellent book after its kind, I may speak more briefly. With the exception of *A Tale of Two Cities*, it was Dickens' only attempt in the historical novel. In the earlier work the relation between the foreground and background of the story is skilfully contrived, and the colouring of the whole, without any elaborate attempt at accurate fidelity, has a generally true and harmonious effect. With the help of her portrait by a painter (Mr. Frith) for whose pictures Dickens had a great liking, Dolly Varden has justly taken hold of the popular fancy as a charming type of a pretty girl of a century ago. And some of the local descriptions in the early part of the book are hardly less pleasing: the Temple in summer, as it was before the charm of Fountain Court was destroyed by its guardians; and the picturesque comforts of the Maypole Inn, described beforehand, by way of contrast to the desecration of its central sanctuary. The intrigue of the story is fairly interesting in itself, and

the gentlemanly villain who plays a principal part in it, though, as usual, over-elaborated, is drawn with more skill than Dickens usually displays in such characters. After the main interest of the book has passed to the historical action of the George Gordon riots, the story still retains its coherence, and, a few minor improbabilities apart, is successfully conducted to its close. No historical novel can altogether avoid the banalities of the species; and though Dickens, like all the world, had his laugh at the late Mr. G. P. R. James, he is constrained to introduce the historical hero of the tale, with his confidential adviser, and his attendant, in the familiar guise of three horsemen. As for Lord George Gordon himself, and the riots of which the responsibility remains inseparable from his unhappy memory, the representation of them in the novel sufficiently accords both with poetic probability and with historical fact. The poor lord's evil genius indeed, Gashford—who has no historical original—tries the reader's sense of verisimilitude rather hard; such converts are uncommon except among approvers. The Protestant hangman, on the other hand, has some slight historical warranty; but the leading part which he is made to play in the riots, and his resolution to go any lengths "in support of the great Protestant principle of hanging," overshoot the mark. It cannot be said that there is any substantial exaggeration in the description of the riots; thus, the burning of the great distiller's house in Holborn is a well-authenticated fact; and there is abundant vigour in the narrative. Repetition is unavoidable in treating such a theme, but in *Barnaby Rudge* it is not rendered less endurable by mannerism, nor puffed out with rhetoric.

One very famous character in this story was, as person-

ages in historical novels often are, made up out of two originals.[1] This was Grip the Raven, who, after seeing the idiot hero of the tale safe through his adventures, resumed his addresses on the subject of the kettle to the horses in the stable; and who, "as he was a mere infant when Barnaby was gray, has very probably gone on talking to the present time." In a later preface to *Barnaby Rudge*, Dickens, with infinite humour, related his experiences of the two originals in question, and how he had been ravenless since the mournful death before the kitchen fire of the second of the pair, the *Grip* of actual life. This occurred in the house at Devonshire Terrace, into which the family had moved two years before (in 1839).

As Dickens' fame advanced, his circle of acquaintances was necessarily widened; and in 1841 he was invited to visit Edinburgh, and to receive there the first great tribute of public recognition which had been paid to him. He was entertained with great enthusiasm at a public banquet, voted the freedom of the city, and so overwhelmed with hospitalities that, notwithstanding his frank pleasure in these honours, he was glad to make his escape at last, and refreshed himself with a tour in the Highlands. These excitements may have intensified in him a desire which had for some time been active in his mind, and which in any case would have been kept alive by an incessant series of invitations. He had signed an

[1] As there is hardly a character in the whole world of fiction and the drama without some sort of a literary predecessor, so Dickens may have derived the first notion of Grip from the raven Ralpho—likewise the property of an idiot—who frightened Roderick Random and Strap out of their wits, and into the belief that he *was* the personage Grip so persistently declared himself to be.

agreement with his publishers for a new book before this desire took the shape of an actual resolution. There is no great difficulty in understanding why Dickens made up his mind to go to America, and thus to interrupt for the moment a course of life and work which was fast leading him on to great heights of fame and fortune. The question of international copyright alone would hardly have induced him to cross the seas. Probably he felt instinctively that to see men and cities was part of the training as well as of the recreation which his genius required. Dickens was by nature one of those artists who when at work always long to be in sympathy with their public, and to know it to be in sympathy with them. And hitherto he had not met more than part of his public of readers face to face.

CHAPTER III.

STRANGE LANDS.

1842—1847.

A JOURNEY across the Atlantic in midwinter is no child's-play even at the present day, when, bad though their passage may have been, few people would venture to confess doubts, as Dickens did, concerning the safety of such a voyage by steam in heavy weather. The travellers —for Dickens was accompanied by his wife—had an exceptionally rough crossing, the horrors of which he has described in his *American Notes*. His powers of observation were alive in the midst of the lethargy of sea-sickness, and when he could not watch others he found enough amusement in watching himself. At last, on January 28th, 1842, they found themselves in Boston harbour. Their stay in the United States lasted about four months, during which time they saw Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Washington, Richmond, Cincinnati, St. Louis, Chicago, and Buffalo. Then they passed by Niagara into Canada, and after a pleasant visit to Montreal, diversified by private theatricals with the officers there, were safe at home again in July.

Dickens had met with an enthusiastic welcome in every part of the States where he had not gone out of the way

of it; in New York, in particular, he had been fêted, with a fervour unique even in the history of American enthusiasms, under the resounding title of "the Guest of the Nation." Still, even this imposed no moral obligation upon him to take the advice tendered to him in America, and to avoid writing about that country—"we are so very suspicious." On the other hand, whatever might be his indignation at the obstinate unwillingness of the American public to be moved a hair's-breadth by his championship of the cause of international copyright,[1] this failure could not, in a mind so reasonable as his, have outweighed the remembrance of the kindness shown to him and to his fame. But the truth seems to be that he had, if not at first, at least very speedily, taken a dislike to American ways which proved too strong for him to the last. In strange lands, most of all in a country which, like the United States, is not in the least ashamed to be what it is, travellers are necessarily at the outset struck by details; and Dickens' habit of minute observation was certain not to let him lose many of them. He was neither long enough in the country to study very closely, nor was it in his way to ponder very deeply, the problems involved in the existence of many of the institutions with which he found fault. Thus, he was indignant at the sight of slavery, and even ventured to "tell a piece of his mind" on the subject to a Judge in the South; but when, twenty years later, the great struggle came, at the root of which this question lay, his sympathies were with the cause of disunion and slavery in its conflict with the "mad and

[1] After dining at a party including the son of an eminent man of letters, he notes in his *Remembrancer* that he found the great man's son "decidedly lumpish," and appends the reflexion: "Copyrights need be hereditary, for genius isn't."

villainous" North. In short, his knowledge of America and its affairs was gained in such a way and under such circumstances as to entitle him, if he chose, to speak to the vast public which he commanded as an author, of men and manners as observed by him; but he had no right to judge the destinies and denounce the character of a great people on evidence gathered in the course of a holiday tour.

Nor, indeed, did the *American Notes*, published by him after his return home, furnish any serious cause of offence. In an introductory chapter, which was judiciously suppressed, he had taken credit for the book as not having "a grain of any political ingredient in its whole composition." Indeed, the contents were rather disappointing from their meagreness. The author showed good taste in eschewing all reference to his personal reception, and good judgment in leaving the copyright question undiscussed. But though his descriptions were as vivid as usual—whether of the small steamboat, "of about half a pony power," on the Connecticut river, or of the dismal scenery on the Mississippi, "great father of rivers, who (praise be to Heaven) has no young children like him!"—and though some of the figure-sketches were touched off with the happiest of hands, yet the public, even in 1842, was desirous to learn something more about America than this. It is true that Dickens had, with his usual conscientiousness, examined and described various interesting public institutions in the States—prisons, asylums, and the like; but the book was not a very full one; it was hardly anything but a sketch-book, with more humour, but with infinitely less poetic spirit, than the *Sketch-book* of the illustrious American author, whose friendship had been one of the chief personal gains of Dickens' journey.

The *American Notes*, for which the letters to Forster had furnished ample materials, were published in the year of Dickens' return, after he had refreshed himself with a merry Cornish trip in the company of his old friend, and his two other intimates, "Stanny" and "Mac." But he had not come home, as he had not gone out, to be idle. On the first day of the following year, 1843, appeared the first number of the story which was to furnish the real *casus discriminis* between Dickens and the enemies, as well no doubt as a very large proportion of the friends, whom he had left behind him across the water. The American scenes in *Martin Chuzzlewit* did not, it is true, begin till the fifth number of the story; nor is it probable from the accounts of the sale, which was much smaller than Dickens had expected, that these particular episodes at first produced any strong feeling in the English public. But the merits of the book gradually obtained for it a popularity at home which has been surpassed by that of but one or two other of Dickens' works; and in proportion to this popularity was the effect exercised by its American chapters. What that effect has been, it would be hypocrisy to question.

Dickens, it is very clear, had been unable to resist the temptation of at once drawing upon the vast addition to his literary capital as a humourist. That the satire of many of the American scenes in *Martin Chuzzlewit* is, as satire, not less true than telling, it needs but a small acquaintance with American journalism and oratory even at the present day to perceive; and the heartrending history of Eden, as a type of some of the settlements "vaunted in England as a mine of Golden Hope," at least had the warrant of something more than hearsay and a look in passing. Nor, as has already been observed, would it have

been in accordance either with human nature, or with the fitness of things, had Dickens allowed his welcome in America to become to him (as he termed it in the suppressed Preface to the *Notes*) "an iron muzzle disguised beneath a flower or two." But the frankness, to say the least, of the mirror into which he now invited his late hosts to gaze, was not likely to produce grateful compliments to its presenter, nor was the effect softened by the despatch with which this *souvenir* of the "guest of the nation" was pressed upon its attention. No doubt it would have been easy to reflect that only the evil, not the good, sides of social life in America were held up to derision and contempt, and that an honourable American journalist had no more reason to resent the portraiture of Mr. Jefferson Brick than a virtuous English *paterfamilias* had to quarrel with that of Mr. Pecksniff. Unfortunately, offence is usually taken where offence is meant; and there can be little doubt as to the *animus* with which Dickens had written. Only two months after landing at Boston Dickens had declared to Macready, that "however much he liked the ingredients of this great dish, he could not but say that the dish itself went against the grain with him, and that he didn't like it." It was not, and could not be, pleasant for Americans to find the "*New York Sewer*, in its twelfth thousand, with a whole column of New Yorkers to be shown up, and all their names printed," introduced as the first expression of "the bubbling passions of their country;" or to be certified, apropos of a conversation among American "gentlemen" after dinner, that dollars, and dollars only, at the risk of honesty and honour, filled their souls. "No satirist," Martin Chuzzlewit is told by a candid and open-minded American, "could, I believe, breathe this air."

But satire in such passages as these, borders too closely on angry invective; and neither the irresistible force, nor the earnest pathos, of the details which follow, can clear away the suspicion that at the bottom lay a desire to depreciate. Nor was the general effect of the American episodes in *Martin Chuzzlewit* materially modified by their conclusion, to which, with the best of intentions, the author could not bring himself to give a genuinely complimentary turn. The Americans did not like all this, and could not be expected to like it. The tone of the whole satire was too savage, and its tenor was too hopelessly onesided, for it to pass unresented; while much in it was too near the truth to glance off harmless. It is well known that in time Dickens came himself to understand this. Before quitting America in 1868, he declared his intention to publish in every future edition of his *American Notes* and *Martin Chuzzlewit*, his testimony to the magnanimous cordiality of his second reception in the States, and to the amazing changes for the better which he had seen everywhere around him during his second sojourn in the country. But it is not likely that the postscript, all the more since it was added under circumstances so honourable to both sides, has undone, or will undo, the effect of the text. Very possibly the Americans may, in the eyes of the English people as well as in their own, cease to be chargeable with the faults and foibles satirised by Dickens; but the satire itself will live, and will continue to excite laughter and loathing, together with the other satire of the powerful book to which it belongs.

For in none of his books is that power, which at times filled their author himself with astonishment, more strikingly and abundantly revealed than in *The Life and*

Adventures of Martin Chuzzlewit. Never was his inventive force more flexible and more at his command; yet none of his books cost him more hard work. The very names of hero and novel were only the final fortunate choice out of a legion of notions; though "Pecksniff" as well as "Charity" and "Mercy" ("not unholy names, I hope," said Mr. Pecksniff to Mrs. Todgers) were first inspirations. The MS. text too is full of the outward signs of care. But the author had his reward in the general impression of finish which is conveyed by this book as compared with its predecessors; so that *Martin Chuzzlewit* may be described as already one of the masterpieces of Dickens' maturity as a writer. Oddly enough, the one part of the book which moves rather heavily is the opening chapter, an effort in the mock-heroic, probably suggested by the author's eighteenth century readings.

A more original work, however, than *Martin Chuzzlewit* was never composed, or one which more freshly displays the most characteristic qualities of its author's genius. Though the actual construction of the story is anything but faultless—for what could be more slender than the thread by which the American interlude is attached to the main action, or more wildly improbable than the hazardous stratagem of old Martin upon which that action turns?—yet it is so contrived as to fulfil the author's avowed intention of exhibiting under various forms the evil and the folly of selfishness. This vice is capable of both serious and comic treatment, and commended itself in each aspect to Dickens as being essentially antagonistic to his moral and artistic ideals of human life. A true comedy of humours thus unfolded itself with the progress of his book, and one for which the types had not been fetched from afar: "Your homes

the scene; yourselves the actors here" had been the motto which he had at first intended to put upon his title-page. Thus, while in "the old-established firm of Anthony Chuzzlewit and Son" selfishness is cultivated as a growth excellent in itself, and the son's sentiment, "Do other men, for they would do you," is applauded by his admiring father, in young Martin the vice rather resembles a weed strong and rank, yet not so strong but that it gives way at last before a manly endeavour to uproot it. The character of the hero, though very far from heroic, is worked out with that reliance upon the fellow-feeling of candid readers which in our great novelists of the eighteenth century has obtained sympathy for much less engaging personages. More especially is the young man's loss of self-respect in the season of his solitary wretchedness depicted with admirable feeling. It would not, I think, be fanciful to assert that in this story Dickens has with equal skill distinguished between two species of unselfishness. Mark Tapley's is the actively unselfish nature, and though his reiteration of his guiding motive is wearisome and occasionally absurd, yet the power of coming out jolly under unpropitious circumstances is a genuinely English ideal of manly virtue. Tom Pinch's character, on the other hand, is unselfish from innate sweetness; and never has the art of Dickens drawn a type which, while closely approaching the borderline of the grotesque, is yet so charmingly true to nature.

Grotesque characters proper are numerous enough in this book, but all the others pale before the immortal presence of Mrs. Gamp. She has been traced to an original in real life, but her literary right to stand on her own legs has been most properly vindicated against any supposition of likeness to the different type, the subject of Leigh Hunt's

Monthly Nurse,—a paper, by the way, distinguished by shrewdness as well as feeling. Imagination has never taken bolder flights than those requisite for the development of Mrs. Gamp's mental processes:

"And which of all them smoking monsters is the Ankworks boat, I wonder. Goodness me!" cried Mrs. Gamp.

"What boat did you want?" asked Ruth.

"The Ankworks package," Mrs. Gamp replied. "I will not deceive you, my sweet. Why should I?"

"That is the Antwerp packet in the middle," said Ruth.

"And I wish it was in Jonadge's belly, I do," cried Mrs. Gamp, appearing to confound the prophet with the whale in this miraculous aspiration.

A hardly inferior exertion of creative power was needed in order to fix in distinct forms the peculiarities of her diction, nay, to sustain the unique rhythm of her speech:

"I says to Mrs. Harris," Mrs. Gamp continued, "only t' other day, the last Monday fortnight as ever dawned upon this Piljian's Projiss of a mortal wale; I says to Mrs. Harris, when she says to me, 'Years and our trials, Mrs. Gamp, sets marks upon us all.' 'Say not the words, Mrs. Harris, if you and me is to be continual friends, for sech is not the case.'"

Yet the reality of Mrs. Gamp has been acknowledged to be such that she has been the death of her sisterhood in a great part (to say the least) of our hospital wards and sick rooms; and as for her oddities of tongue, they are, with the exception of her boldest figures, but the glorified type of all the utterances heard to this day from charwomen, laundresses, and single gentlemen's housekeepers. Compared with her, even her friend and patron, Mr. Mould, and her admirer, Mr. Bailey, and in other parts of the book the low company at Todgers' and the fine company at Mr. Tigg Montague's sink into insignificance. The aged Chuffey is a grotesque study of a very different

kind, of which the pathos never loses itself in exaggeration. As for Pecksniff, he is as far out of the range of grotesque, as, except when moralising over the banisters at Todgers', he is out of that of genial, characters. He is the richest comic type, while at the same time one of the truest, among the innumerable reproductions in English imaginative literature of our favourite national vice—hypocrisy. His friendliness is the very quintessence of falsehood: "Mr. Pinch," he cries to poor Tom over the currant wine and captain's biscuits, "if you spare the bottle, we shall quarrel!" His understanding with his daughters is the very perfection of guile, for they confide in him, even when ignorant of his intentions, because of their certainty "that in all he does, he has his purpose straight and full before him." And he is a man who understands the times as well as the land in which he lives; for, as M. Taine has admirably pointed out, where Tartuffe would have been full of religious phrases, Pecksniff presents himself as a humanitarian philosopher. Comic art has never more successfully fulfilled its highest task after its truest fashion than in this picture of the rise and fall of a creature, who never ceases to be laughable, and yet never ceases to be loathsome. Nothing is wanting in this wonderful book to attest the exuberance of its author's genius. The kindly poetic spirit of the Christmas books breathes in sweet Ruth Pinch; and the tragic power of the closing chapters of *Oliver Twist* is recalled by the picture of Jonas before and after his deed of blood. I say nothing of merely descriptive passages, though in none of his previous stories had Dickens so completely mastered the secret of describing scenery and weather in their relation to his action or his characters.

Martin Chuzzlewit ran its course of twenty monthly

numbers; but already a week or two before the appearance of the first of these, Dickens had bestowed upon the public, young and old, the earliest of his delightful *Christmas Books*. Among all his productions perhaps none connected him so closely, and as it were personally, with his readers. Nor could it well have been otherwise; since nowhere was he so directly intent upon promoting kindliness of feeling among men,—more especially goodwill, founded upon respect, towards the poor. Cheerfulness was, from his point of view, twin-sister to charity; and sulkiness, like selfishness, belonged, as an appropriate ort, to the dustheap of "Tom Tiddler's Ground." What more fit than that he should mingle such sentiments as these with the holly and the mistletoe of the only English holiday in which remains a vestige of religious and poetic feeling? Beyond all doubt there is much that is tedious in the *cultus* of Father Christmas, and there was yet more in the days when the lower classes in England had not yet come to look upon a sufficiency of periodical holidays as part of their democratic inheritance. But that Dickens should constitute himself its chief minister and interpreter was nothing but fit. Already one of the *Sketches* had commended a Christmas dinner at which a seat is not denied even to "poor Aunt Margaret;" and Mr. Pickwick had never been more himself than in the Christmas game of Blind-man's-buff at Dingley Dell, in which "the poor relations caught the people who they thought would like it," and, when the game flagged, "got caught themselves." But he now sought to reach the heart of the subject; and the freshness of his fancy enabled him delightfully to vary his illustrations of a text of which it can do no man harm to be reminded in as well as out of season.

Dickens' Christmas Books were published in the Christmas seasons of 1843–1846, and of 1848. If the palm is to be granted to any one among them above its fellows, few readers would hesitate, I think, to declare themselves in favour of *The Cricket on the Hearth*, as tender and delicate a domestic idyll as any literature can boast. But the informing spirit proper of these productions, the desire to stir up a feeling of benevolence, more especially towards the poor and lowly, nowhere shows itself more conspicuously than in the earliest, *A Christmas Carol in Prose*, and nowhere more combatively than in the second in date, the "Goblin Story" of *The Chimes*. Of the former its author declared that he "wept and laughed and wept again" over it, "and excited himself in a most extraordinary manner in the composition; and thinking thereof he walked about the black streets of London, fifteen and twenty miles many a night, when all the sober folks had gone to bed." Simple in its romantic design like one of Andersen's little tales, the *Christmas Carol* has never lost its hold upon a public in whom it has called forth Christmas thoughts which do not all centre on "holly, mistletoe, red berries, ivy, turkeys, geese, game, poultry, brawn, meat, pigs, sausages, oysters, pies, puddings, fruit, and punch;" and the Cratchit household, with Tiny Tim, who did NOT die, are living realities even to those who have not seen Mr. Toole—an actor after Dickens' own heart—as the father of the family, shivering in his half-yard of comforter.

In *The Chimes*, composed in self-absorbed solitude at Genoa, he imagined that "he had written a tremendous book, and knocked the *Carol* out of the field." Though the little work failed to make "the great uproar" he had confidently anticipated, its purpose was certainly

unmistakeable; but the effect of hard exaggerations such as Mr. Filer and Alderman Cute, and of a burlesque absurdity like Sir Joseph Bowley, was too dreary to be counteracted by the more pleasing passages of the tale. In his novel *Hard Times*, Dickens afterwards reproduced some of the ideas, and repeated some of the artistic mistakes, to be found in *The Chimes*, though the design of the later work was necessarily of a more mixed kind. The Christmas book has the tone of a *doctrinaire* protest against *doctrinaires*, and, as Forster has pointed out, is manifestly written under the influence of Carlyle. But its main doctrine was one which Dickens lost no opportunity of proclaiming, and which here breaks forth in the form of an indignant appeal by Richard Fern, the outlaw in spite of himself: "Gentlefolks, be not hard upon the poor!" No feeling was more deeply rooted in Dickens' heart than this; nor could he forbear expressing it by invective and satire as well as by humorous and pathetic pictures of his clients, among whom Trotty Veck too takes a representative place.

The Cricket on the Hearth, as a true work of art, is not troubled about its moral, easily though half-a-dozen plain morals might be drawn from it; a purer and more lightsome creation of the fancy has never been woven out of homespun materials. Of the same imaginative type, though not executed with a fineness so surpassing, is *The Battle of Life*, the treatment of a fancy in which Dickens appears to have taken great pleasure. Indeed, he declared that he was "thoroughly wretched at having to use the idea for so short a story." As it stands, it is a pretty idyll of resignation, very poetical in tone as well as in conception, though here and there, notwithstanding the complaint just quoted, rather lengthy. It has been con-

jectured, with much probability, that the success which had attended dramatic versions of Dickens' previous Christmas Books caused "those admirable comedians, Mr. and Mrs. Keeley," to be in his mind "when he drew the charming characters of Britain and Clemency Newcome." At all events the pair serve as good old bits of English pottery to relieve the delicate Sèvres sentiment of Grace and Marion. In the last of Dickens' Christmas Books, *The Haunted Man and the Ghost's Bargain*, he returns once more to a machinery resembling those of the earliest. But the fancy on which the action turns is here more forced, and the truth which it illustrates is after all only a half-truth, unless taken as part of the greater truth, that the moral conditions of man's life are more easily marred than mended. Once more the strength of the book lies in its humorous side. The picture of the good Milly's humble proteges the Tetterby family is to remind us that happiness consists precisely in that which the poor and the rich may alike obtain, but which it is so difficult for the poor, amidst their shifts and shabbiness, to keep fresh and green. Even without the evil influence of an enchanted chemist, it is hard enough for the Mrs. Tetterbys of real life always to be ministering angels to their families; for the hand of every little Tetterby not occasionally to be against the other little Tetterbys, and even for a devoted Johnny's temper never to rise against Moloch. All the more is that to be cherished in the poor which makes them love one another.

More than one of these Christmas books, both the humour and the sentiment of which are so peculiarly English, was written on foreign soil. Dickens' general conceptions of life, not less than his literary individuality,

had been formed before he became a traveller and sojourner in foreign lands. In Italy, as elsewhere, a man will, in a sense, find only what he takes there. At all events the changed life brought with it for Dickens, though not at once, a refreshment and a brief repose which invigorated him for some of the truest efforts of his genius. His resolution to spend some time on the Continent had not been taken rashly, although it was at least hastened by business disappointments. He seems at this time as was virtually inevitable, to have seen a good deal of society in London, and more especially to have become a welcome guest of Lady Blessington and Count d'Orsay at Gore House. Moreover, his services were beginning to be occasionally claimed as a public speaker; and altogether he must have found more of his time than he wished slipping through his hands. Lastly, he very naturally desired to see what was to be seen, and to enjoy what was to be enjoyed, by one gifted with a sleepless observation and animated by a genuine love of nature and art. The letters, public and private, which he wrote from Italy, are not among the most interesting productions of his pen; even his humour seems now and then ill at ease in them, and his descriptive power narrow in its range. His eyes were occasionally veiled, as are those of most travellers in quest of "first impressions." Thus I cannot but think his picture of Naples inadequate, and that of its population unjust. Again, although he may have told the truth in asserting that the Eternal City, at first sight, "looked like—I am half afraid to write the word—like LONDON," and although his general description of Rome has been pronounced correct by competent judgment, yet it is impossible to ignore in it the undertone of Bow

Bells. On the other hand, not even in his newspaper letters can he be said to fall into affectation; his impressions are never given pretentiously, and are accordingly seldom altogether worthless; while his criticisms of works of art, when offered, are candid and shrewd, besides being invariably his own.

Thus, there was never anything truer in its way than the account which he gave to Maclise of his first impressions a few days after his arrival at Albaro, a suburb of Genoa, where he found himself settled with his family in July 1844. He re-christened his abode, the Villa Bagnerello ("it sounds romantic, but Signor Banderello is a butcher hard by"), "the Pink Jail." Here, with abundance of space and time, and with a view from his writing-table of "the sea, the mountains, the washed-out villas, the vineyards, the blistering hot fort, with a sentry on the drawbridge standing in a bit of shadow no broader than his own musket, and the sky," he began his *villeggiatura*, and resolving not to know, or to be known where it could be helped, looked round him at his leisure. This looking round very naturally took up some time; for the circuit of Dickens' daily observation was unusually wide. Soon he was seeking winter quarters in Genoa itself, and by October, was established in the Palazzo Peschiere, situate on a height within the walls of the city, and overlooking the whole of it, with the harbour and the sea beyond. "There is not in Italy, they say (and I believe them), a lovelier residence." Even here, however, among fountains and frescoes, it was some time before he could set steadily to work at his Christmas story. At last the bells of Genoa chimed a title for it into his restless ears; and, though longing with a nostalgy that was specially strong upon him at periods of mental

excitement for his nightly walks in the London streets, he settled down to his task. I have already described the spirit in which he executed it. No sooner was the writing done, than the other half of his double artist-nature was seized with another craving. The rage which possesses authors to read their writings aloud to sympathising ears, if such can be found, is a well-worn theme of satire; but in Dickens, the actor was almost as strong as the author, and he could not withstand the desire to interpret in person what he had written, and to watch its effect with his own eyes and ears. In the first days of November, therefore, he set off from Genoa, and made his way home by Bologna, Venice, Milan, and the Simplon Pass. Of this journey, his *Pictures from Italy* contains the record, including a chapter about Venice, pitched in an unusually poetic key. But not all the memories of all the Doges could have stayed the execution of his set purpose. On the 30th of November he reached London, and on the 2nd of December he was reading the *Chimes*, from the proofs, to the group of friends immortalised in Maclise's inimitable sketch. Three days afterwards the reading was repeated to a slightly different audience; and, indeed, it would seem, from an enthusiastic postscript to a letter addressed to his wife, that he had read at least part of the book to Macready on the night before that of the first conclave. The distance was no doubt wide between the intimacy of these friendly readings and the stormy seas of public audiences; but, however unconsciously, the first step had been taken. It may be worth noticing, in connexion with this, that the scheme of a private dramatic performance, which was to occupy much of Dickens' "leisure" in the year following, was proposed for the first time on the occasion of the first reading of the *Chimes*. Before

Christmas he was back again in his "Italian bowers." If the strain of his effort in writing the *Chimes* had been severe, the holiday which followed was long. In the later winter and early spring of 1845 he and the ladies of his family saw Rome and Naples, and in June their Italian life came to an end, and they were in London before the close of the month. Projects of work remained in abeyance until the absorbing fancy of a private play had been realised with an earnestness such as only Dickens could carry into his amusements, and into this particular amusement above all others. The play was *Every Man in his Humour*; the theatre, the little house in Dean Street, of whose chequered fortunes no theatrical history has succeeded in exhausting the memories; and the manager was of course "Bobadil," as Dickens now took to signing himself. His joking remark to Macready, that he "thought of changing his present mode of life, and was open to an engagement," was after all not so very wide of the mark. According to the inevitable rule in such things, he and his friends—among whom Mark Lemon, Douglas Jerrold, and Forster were conspicuous—were "induced" to repeat their performance at a larger house for a public charity, and later in the year they played *The Elder Brother* for Miss Fanny Kelly's benefit. Leigh Hunt, whose opinion however could hardly fail to be influenced by the circumstances under which Ben Jonson's comedy was afterwards performed by the amateurs, and who was no longer the youthful Draco of the *News*, afterwards spoke very highly of Dickens' Bobadil. It had "a spirit in it of intellectual apprehension beyond anything the existing stage has shown." His acting in the farce which followed, Leigh Hunt thought "throughout admirable; quite rich and filled up."

Christmas, 1845, had passed, and *The Cricket on the Hearth* had graced the festival, when an altogether new chapter in Dickens' life seemed about to open for him. The experience through which he now passed was one on which his biographer, for reasons easy to guess, has touched very slightly, while his *Letters* throw no additional light on it at all. Most people, I imagine, would decline to pronounce upon the qualifications requisite in an editor of a great political journal. Yet, literary power of a kind which acts upon the multitude rapidly and powerfully, habits of order so confirmed as to have almost become second nature, and an interest in the affairs of the nation fed by an ardent enthusiasm for its welfare—these would seem to go some way towards making up the list. Of all these qualifications Dickens at various times gave proof, and they sufficed in later years to make him the successful conductor of a weekly journal which aimed at the enlightenment hardly less than at the entertainment of no inconsiderable portion of the British public. But, in the first place, political journalism proper is a craft of which very few men have been known to become masters by intuition, and Dickens had as yet had no real experience of it. His zealous efforts as a reporter can hardly be taken into account here. He had for a short time edited a miscellany of amusement, and had failed to carry beyond a beginning the not very carefully considered scheme of another. Recently, he had resumed the old notion of *Master Humphrey's Clock* in a different shape; but nothing had come of his projected cheap weekly paper for the present, while its title, "*The Cricket*," was reserved for a different use. Since his reporting days he had, however, now and then appeared among the lighter combatants of political litera-

ture. In 1841 he had thrown a few squibs in the *Examiner* at Sir Robert Peel and the Tories; and from about the same date he had, besides occasionally contributing to the literary and theatrical columns of the same weekly journal, now and then discussed in it subjects of educational or other general interest.[1] Finally, it is stated by Forster, that in 1844, when the greatest political struggle of the last generation was approaching its climax, Dickens contributed some articles to the *Morning Chronicle* which attracted attention and led to negotiations with the editor that arrived at no positive result. If these contributions treated any political questions whatever, they were, with the exception of the few *Examiner* papers, and of the letters to the *Daily News* to be mentioned in this chapter, the only articles of this kind which, to my knowledge, he ever wrote.

For, from first to last, whether in the days when Oliver Twist suffered under the maladministration of the Poor-Law, or in those when Arthur Clennam failed to make an impression upon the Circumlocution Office, politics were with Dickens a sentiment rather than a study or a pursuit. With his habits of application and method, it might have taken but a very short time for him to train himself as a politician; but this short time never actually occurred. There is, however, no reason to suppose that when, in 1841, a feeler was put out by some more or less influential persons at Reading, with regard to his willingness to be nominated for the representation of that borough, he had any reason for declining the proposal besides that which he stated in his replies. He could not afford the requisite

[1] From a list of MSS. at South Kensington, kindly furnished me by Mr. R. F. Sketchley, I find that Mr. R. H. Shepherd's *Bibliography of Dickens* is incomplete on this head.

expense; and he was determined not to forfeit his independence through accepting Government—by which I hope he means Whig party—aid for meeting the cost of the contest. Still, in 1845, though slack of faith in the "people who govern us," he had not yet become the irreclaimable political sceptic of later days; and without being in any way bound to the Whigs, he had that general confidence in Lord John Russell which was all they could expect from their irregular followers. As yet, however, he had shown no sign of any special aptitude or inclination for political work, though if he addressed himself to questions affecting the health and happiness of the humbler classes, he was certain to bring to them the enthusiasm of a genuine sympathy. And a question of this kind was uppermost in Englishmen's minds in this year 1845, when at last the time was drawing near for the complete abolition of the tax upon the staple article of the poor man's daily food.

The establishment of a new London morning paper, on the scale to which those already in existence had attained, was a serious matter in itself; but it seems to have been undertaken in no spirit of diffidence by the projectors and first proprietors of the *Daily News*. With the early history of the experiment I cannot here concern myself; it is, however, an open secret that the rate of expenditure of the new journal was at first on a most liberal, not to say lavish, scale, and that the losses of the proprietors were for many years very large indeed. Established on those principles of radicalism which, on the whole, it has in both good and evil times consistently maintained, the *Daily News* was to rise superior to the opportunism, if not to the advertisements, of the *Times*, and to outstrip the cautious steps of the Whig *Morning Chronicle*.

Special attention was to be given to those industrial enterprises with which the world teemed in that speculative age, and no doubt also to those social questions affecting the welfare and elevation of the masses and the relations between employers and employed, which were attracting more and more of the public attention. But in the first instance the actual political situation would oblige the new journal to direct the greater part of its energies to one particular question, which had, in truth, already been threshed out by the organs of public opinion, and as to which the time for action had at last arrived. No liberal journal projected in 1845, and started early in 1846, could fail to concentrate its activity for a time upon the question of the corn-laws, to which the session of 1846 was to give the death-blow.

It is curious enough, on opening the first number of the *Daily News*, dated January 21st, 1846, to find oneself transplanted into the midst of one of the most memorable episodes of our more recent political history. The very advertisements of subscriptions to the Anti-Corn-Law League, with the good old Manchester names figuring conspicuously among them, have a historic interest; and the report of a disputation on free trade at Norwich, in which all the hits are made by Mr. Cobden, another report of a great London meeting on the same subject, and some verses concerning the people's want of its bread, probably written by Mr. Charles Mackay, occupy an entire page of the paper. Railway news and accounts of railway meetings fill about the same space; while the foreign news is extremely meagre. There remain the leading articles, four in number—of which three are on the burning question of the day—and the first of a series of *Travelling Letters written on the Road, by Charles Dickens*

(the Avignon chapter in the *Pictures from Italy*).[1] The hand of the editor is traceable only in this *feuilleton* and in the opening article of the new paper. On internal evidence I conclude that this article, which has little to distinguish it from similar manifestoes, unless it be a moderation of tone that would not have suited Captain Shandon, was not written by Dickens alone or unassisted. But his hand is traceable in the concluding paragraphs, which contain the following wordy but spirited assertion of a cause that Dickens lost no opportunity of advocating:

> We seek, so far as in us lies, to elevate the character of the Public Press in England. We believe it would attain a much higher position, and that those who wield its powers would be infinitely more respected as a class, and an important one, if it were purged of a disposition to sordid attacks *upon itself*, which only prevails in England and America. We discern nothing in the editorial plural that justifies a gentleman, or body of gentlemen, in discarding a gentleman's forbearance and responsibility, and venting ungenerous spleen against a rival, by a perversion of a great power—a power, however, which is only great so long as it is good and honest. The stamp on newspapers is not like the stamp on universal medicine-bottles, which licenses anything, however false and monstrous; and we are sure this misuse of it, in any notorious case, not only offends and repels right-minded men in that particular instance, but naturally, though unjustly, involves the whole Press, as a pursuit or profession, in the feeling so awakened, and places the character of all who are associated with it at a great disadvantage.

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[1] By an odd coincidence, not less than four out of the six theatres advertising their performances in this first number of the *Daily News* announce each a different adaptation of *The Cricket on the Hearth*. Among the curiosities of the casts are observable: at the Adelphi, Wright as Tilly Slowboy, and at the Haymarket Buckstone in the same character, with William Farren as Caleb Plummer. The latter part is taken at the Princess's by Compton, Mrs. Stirling playing Dot. At the Lyceum, Mr., Mrs., and Miss Mary Keeley, and Mr. Emery appear in the piece.

Entering on this adventure of a new daily journal in a spirit of honourable competition and hope of public usefulness, we seek, in our new station, at once to preserve our own self-respect, and to be respected, for ourselves and for it, by our readers. Therefore, we beg them to receive, in this our first number, the assurance that no recognition or interchange of trade abuse, by us, shall be the destruction of either sentiment; and that we intend proceeding on our way, and theirs, without stooping to any such flowers by the roadside.

I am unable to say how many days it was after the appearance of this first number that Dickens, or the proprietors of the journal, or, as seems most likely, both sides simultaneously, began to consider the expediency of ending the connexion between them. He was "revolving plans for quitting the paper" on January 30th, and resigned his editorship on February 9th following. In the interval, with the exception of two or three more of the *Travelling Letters*, very few signs of his hand appear in the journal. The number of January 24th, however, contains an editorial contribution, in the shape of "a new song, but an old story," concerning *The British Lion*, his accomplishment of eating Corn-Law Leagues, his principal keeper, *Wan Humbug*, and so forth. This it would be cruel to unearth. A more important indication of a line of writing that his example may have helped to domesticate in the *Daily News* appears in the number of February 4th, which contains a long letter, with his signature, urging the claims of Ragged Schools, and giving a graphic account of his visit to one in Saffron Hill. After he had placed his resignation in the hands of the proprietors, and was merely holding on at his post till the time of his actual withdrawal, he was naturally not anxious to increase the number of his contributions. The *Hymn of the Wiltshire Labourers*—which appeared on

February 14th—is, of course, an echo of the popular cry of the day; but the subtler pathos of Dickens never found its way into his verse. The most important, and so far as I know the last, of his contributions to the *Daily News*, consisted of a series of three letters (March 9th, 13th, and 16th) on capital punishment. It was a question which much occupied him at various times of his life, and on which it cannot be shown that he really changed his opinions. The letters in the *Daily News*, based in part on the arguments of one of the ablest men of his day, the "unlucky" Mr. Wakefield, are an interesting contribution to the subject; and the first of them, with its Hogarthian sketch of the temptation and fall of Thomas Hocker, Sunday-school teacher and murderer, would be worth reprinting as an example of Dickens' masterly use of the argument *ex concreto*.

The few traditions which linger in the *Daily News* office concerning Dickens as editor of the paper, agree with the conjecture that his labours on its behalf were limited, or very nearly so, to the few pieces enumerated above. Of course there must have been some inevitable business; but of this much may have been taken off his hands by his sub-editor, Mr. W. H. Wills, who afterwards became his *alter ego* at the office of his own weekly journal and his intimate personal friend. In the days of the first infancy of the *Daily News*, Mr. Britton, the present publisher of that journal, was attached to the editor as his personal office attendant; and he remembers very vividly what little there can have been to remember about Dickens' performance of his functions. His habit, following a famous precedent, was to make up for coming late—usually about half-past ten P.M.—by going away early—usually not long after

midnight. There were frequently sounds of merriment, if not of modest revelry, audible from the little room at the office in Lombard Street, where the editor sat in conclave with Douglas Jerrold and one or two other intimates. Mr. Britton is not sure that the work did not sometimes begin *after the editor had left*; but at all events he cannot recollect that Dickens ever wrote anything at the office—that he ever for instance wrote about a debate that had taken place in Parliament on the same night. And he sums up his reminiscences by declaring his conviction that Dickens was "not a newspaper man, at least not when in 'the chair.'" And so Dickens seems on this occasion to have concluded; for when, not long after quitting the paper, he republished with additions the *Travelling Letters* which during his conduct of it had been its principal ornaments, he spoke of "a brief mistake he had made, not long ago, in disturbing the old relations between himself and his readers, and departing for a moment from his old pursuits." He had been virtually out of "the chair" almost as soon as he had taken it; his successor, but only for a few months, was his friend Forster.

Never has captive released made a more eager or a better use of his recovered freedom. Before the summer had fairly set in, Dickens had let his house, and was travelling with his family up the Rhine towards Switzerland. This was, I think, Dickens' only passage through Germany, which in language and literature remained a *terra incognita* to him, while in various ways so well known to his friendly rivals, Lord Lytton and Thackeray. He was on the track of poor Thomas Hood's old journeyings, whose facetious recollections of Rhineland he had some years before reviewed in a spirit of admira-

tion rather for the author than for the book, funny as it is. His point of destination was Lausanne, where he had resolved to establish his household for the summer, and where by the middle of June they were most agreeably settled in a little villa or cottage which did not belie its name of Rosemont, and from which they looked upon the lake and the mighty Alpine chain beyond. If Rome had reminded Dickens of London, the green woods near Lausanne recalled to him his Kentish glades; but he had the fullest sense and the truest enjoyment of the grandeurs of Alpine scenery, and lost no opportunity of becoming acquainted with them. Thus his letters contain an admirable description (not untinged with satire) of a trip to the Great St. Bernard and its convent, many years afterwards reproduced in one of the few enjoyable chapters of the Second Part of *Little Dorrit*. More interesting, however, because more characteristic, is the freshness and candour with which in Switzerland, where by most English visitors the native inhabitants are "taken for granted," he set himself to observe, and, so far as he could, to appreciate, the people among whom he was a temporary resident. His solutions of some of the political difficulties, which were mostly connected with religious differences, at that time rife in Switzerland, are palpably one-sided. But the generosity of spirit which reveals itself in his kindly recognition of the fine qualities of the people around him, is akin to what was best and noblest in Dickens.

He had, at the same time, been peculiarly fortunate in finding at Lausanne a circle of pleasant acquaintances, to whom he dedicated the Christmas book which he wrote among the roses and the foliage of his lake-side cottage. Of course *The Battle of Life* was read aloud by its author to so kindly an audience. The day of parting,

however, soon came; on the 16th of November *paterfamilias* had his "several tons of luggage, other tons of servants, and other tons of children," in travelling order, and soon had safely stowed them away at Paris "in the most preposterous house in the world. The like of it can not, and so far as my knowledge goes, does not, exist in any other part of the globe. The bedrooms are like opera-boxes; the dining-rooms, staircases, and passages quite inexplicable. The dining-room"—which in another letter he describes as "mere midsummer madness"—"is a sort of cavern painted (ceiling and all) to represent a grove, with unaccountable bits of looking-glass sticking in among the branches of the trees. There is a gleam of reason in the drawing-room, but it is approached through a series of small chambers, like the joints in a telescope, which are hung with inscrutable drapery." Here, with the exception of two brief visits to England, paid before his final departure, he spent three months, familiarising himself for the first time of his life with the second of his "Two Cities."

Dickens came to know the French language well enough to use it with ease, if not with elegance; and he lost no opportunity, it need hardly be said, of resorting to the best of schools for the purpose. Macready, previously addressed from "Altorf," had made him acquainted with Regnier of the Théâtre Français, who in his turn had introduced him to the greenroom of the house of Molière. Other theatres were diligently visited by him and Forster when the latter arrived on a visit; and celebrities were polite and hospitable to their distinguished English *confrère*. With these, however, Dickens was not cosmopolitan enough to consort except in passing; the love of literary society *because* it is literary society was at no time one of his predilections or foibles. The streets of Paris were to

him more than its *salons*, more even than its theatres. They are so to a larger number of Englishmen than that which cares to confess it, but Dickens would have been the last to disown the impeachment. They were the proper sphere for his powers of humorous observation, as he afterwards showed in more than one descriptive paper as true to life as any of his London *Sketches*. And, moreover, he *needed* the streets for the work which he had in hand. *Dombey and Son* had been begun at Rosemont, and the first of its twenty monthly numbers had been published in October, 1846. No reader of the book is likely to forget how, after writing the chapter which relates the death of little Paul, Dickens during the greater part of the night wandered restlessly with a heavy heart about the Paris streets. Sooner, however, than he had intended, his residence abroad had to come to a close; and early in 1847 he and his family were again in London.

Dombey and Son has, perhaps, been more criticised than any other among the stories of its author; and yet it certainly is not the one which has been least admired, or least loved. Dickens himself, in the brief preface which he afterwards prefixed to the story, assumed a half-defiant air which sits ill upon the most successful author, but which occasionally he was tempted to assume. Before condescending to defend the character of Mr. Dombey as in accordance with both probability and experience, he "made so bold as to believe that the faculty (or the habit) of correctly observing the characters of men is a rare one." Yet, though the drawing of this character is only one of the points which have been objected against the story, not only did the book at the time of publication far surpass its predecessor in popularity, but it has, I believe, always preserved to itself a special congregation

of enthusiastic admirers. Manifestly, this novel is one of its author's most ambitious endeavours. In it, more distinctly even than in *Chuzzlewit*, he has chosen for his theme one of the chief vices of human nature, and has striven to show what pride cannot achieve, what it cannot conquer, what it cannot withstand. This central idea gives to the story, throughout a most varied succession of scenes, a unity of action to be found in few of Dickens' earlier works. On the other hand, *Dombey and Son* shares with these earlier productions, and with its successor, *David Copperfield*, the freshness of invention and spontaneous flow of both humour and pathos which at times are wanting in the more powerfully conceived and more carefully constructed romances of Dickens' later years. If there be any force at all in the common remark, that the most interesting part of the book ends together with the life of little Paul, the censure falls upon the whole design of the author. Little Paul, in something besides the ordinary meaning of the words, was born to die; and though, like the writer, most readers may have dreaded the hour which was to put an end to that frail life, yet in this case there could be no question—such as was possible in the story of Little Nell—of any other issue. Indeed, deep as is the pathos of the closing scene, its beauty is even surpassed by those which precede it. In death itself there is release for a child as for a man, and for those sitting by the pillow of the patient; but it is the gradual approach of death which seems hardest of all for the watchers to bear; it is the sinking of hope which seems even sadder than its extinction. What old fashion could that be, Paul wondered with a palpitating heart, that was so visibly expressed in him, so plainly seen by so many people?

Every heart is softened and every eye dimmed, as the innocent child passes on his way to his grave. The hand of God's angel is on him; he is no longer altogether of this world. The imagination which could picture and present this mysterious haze of feeling, through which the narrative moves, half like a reality, half like a dream, is that of a true poet, and of a great one.

What even the loss of his son could not effect in Mr. Dombey is to be accomplished in the progress of the story by a yet stronger agency than sorrow. His pride is to be humbled to the dust, where he is to be sought and raised up by the love of his despised and ill-used daughter. Upon the relations between this pair, accordingly, it was necessary for the author to expend the greatest care, and upon the treatment of those relations the criticism to which the character of Mr. Dombey has been so largely subjected must substantially turn. The unfavourable judgments passed upon it have, in my opinion, not been altogether unjust. The problem obviously was to show how the father's cold indifference towards the daughter gradually becomes jealousy, as he finds that upon her is concentrated, first, the love of his innocent little son, and then that of his haughty second wife; and how hereupon this jealousy deepens into hate. But, unless we are to suppose that Mr. Dombey hated his daughter from the first, the disfavour shown by him on her account to young Walter Gay remains without adequate explanation. His dislike of Florence is not manifestly founded upon his jealousy of what Mrs. Chick calls her brother's "infatuation" for her; and the main motives at work in the unhappy man are either not very skilfully kept asunder, or not very intelligibly intermixed. Nor are the later stages of the relations between father and daughter

altogether satisfactorily conceived. The momentary yielding of Mr. Dombey, after his "coming home" with his new wife, is natural and touching; but his threat to visit his daughter with the consequences of her stepmother's conduct is sheer brutality. The passage in which Mr. Dombey's ultimatum to Mrs. Dombey is conveyed by him in her presence through a third person, is so artificial as to fall not very far short of absurdity. The closing scene which leads to the flight of Florence is undeniably powerful; but it is the developement of the relations between the pair, in which the art of the author is in my judgment occasionally at fault.

As to the general effect of the latter part of the story —or rather of its main plot—which again has been condemned as melodramatic and unnatural, a distinction should be drawn between its incidents and its characters. Neither Edith Dombey nor Mr. Carker is a character of real life. The pride of the former comes very near to bad breeding, and her lapses into sentiment seem artificial lapses. How differently Thackeray would have managed the "high words" between her and her frivolous mother; how differently, for that matter, he *has* managed a not altogether dissimilar scene in the *Newcomes* between Ethel Newcome and old Lady Kew! As for Mr. Carker, with his white teeth and glistening gums, who calls his unhappy brother "Spaniel," and contemplates a life of sensual ease in Sicily, he has the semi-reality of the stage. Possibly, the French stage had helped to suggest the *scène de la pièce* between the fugitives at Dijon—an effective situation, but one which many a novelist might have worked out not less skilfully than Dickens. His own master-hand, however, reasserts itself in the wondrously powerful narrative of Carker's flight and death. Here again, he excites terror—as in

the same book he had evoked pity—by foreshadowing, without prematurely revealing, the end. We know what the morning is to bring which rises in awful tranquillity over the victim of his own sins; and, as in Turner's wild but powerful picture, the engine made by the hand of man for peaceful purposes seems a living agent of wrath.[1]

No other of Dickens' books is more abundantly stocked than this with genuinely comic characters; but nearly all of them, in accordance with the pathetic tone which is struck at the outset, and which never dies out till the story has run its course, are in a more subdued strain of humour. Lord Jeffrey was, I think, warranted in his astonishment that Dickens should devote so much pains to characters like Mrs. Chick and Miss Tox; probably the habit remained with him from his earliest times of authorship, when he had not always distinguished very accurately between the humorous and the *bizarre*. But Polly and the Toodles household, Mrs. Pipchin and her "select infantine boarding-house," and the whole of Doctor Blimber's establishment, from the Doctor himself down to Mr. Toots, and up again, in the scale of intellect, to Mr. Feeder, B.A., are among the most admirable of all the great humorist's creations. Against this ample provision for her poor little brother's nursing and training Florence has to set but her one Susan Nipper; but she is a host in herself, an absolutely original character among the thousands of *soubrettes* that are known to comedy and fiction, and one of the best

[1] It is perhaps worth pointing out, though it is not surprising, that Dickens had a strong sense of what I may call the poetry of the railway train. Of the effect of the weird *Signalman's Story* in one of his Christmas numbers, it is not very easy to rid oneself. There are excellent descriptions of the *rapidity* of a railway journey in the first chapter of *The Lazy Tour*, and in another *Household Words* paper, called *A Flight*.

tonic mixtures ever composed out of much humour and not a few grains of pathos. Her tartness has a cooling flavour of its own; but it is the Mrs. Pipchinses only upon whom she acts, as their type acted upon her, "like early gooseberries." Of course she has a favourite figure of speech belonging to herself, which rhetoricians would probably class among the figures "working by surplusage:"

"Your Toxes and your Chickses may draw out my two front double teeth, Mrs. Richards, but that's no reason why I need offer 'em the whole set."

Dickens was to fall very largely into this habit of "labelling" his characters, as it has been called, by particular tricks or terms of speech; and there is a certain excess in this direction already in *Dombey and Son*, where not only Miss Nipper and Captain Cuttle and Mr. Toots, but Major Bagstock too and Cousin Feenix, are thus furnished forth. But the invention is still so fresh and the play of humour so varied, that this mannerism cannot be said as yet seriously to disturb them. A romantic charm of a peculiar kind clings to honest Captain Cuttle and the quaint home over which he mounts guard during the absence of its owner. The nautical colouring and concomitant fun apart—for only Smollett could have drawn Jack Bunsby's fellow, though the character in his hands would have been differently accentuated—Dickens has never approached more nearly to the manner of Sir Walter Scott than in this singularly attractive part of his book. Elsewhere the story passes into that sphere of society in describing which Dickens was, as a novelist, rarely very successful. But though Edith is cold and unreal, there is, it cannot be denied, human nature in the pigments and figments of her hideous old mother; and, to outward appearance at

all events, the counterparts of her apoplectic admirer, Major Bagstock, still pace those pavements and promenades which it suits them to frequent. Cousin Feenix is likewise very far from impossible, and is besides extremely delightful—and a good fellow too at bottom, so that the sting of the satire is here taken away. On the other hand, the meeting between the *sacs et parchemins* at Mr. Dombey's house is quite out of focus.

The book has other heights and depths, and pleasant and unpleasant parts and passages. But enough has been said to recall the exuberant creative force, and the marvellous strength of pathos and humour which *Dombey and Son* proves that Dickens, now near the very height of his powers as a writer of fiction, possessed. In one of his public readings many years afterwards, when he was reciting the adventures of Little Dombey, he narrates that "a very good fellow," whom he noticed in the stalls, could not refrain from wiping the tears out of his eyes as often as he thought that Toots was coming on. And just as Toots had become a reality to this good fellow, so Toots and Toots' little friend, and divers other personages in this story, have become realities to half the world that reads the English tongue, and to many besides. What higher praise could be given to this wonderful book? Of all the works of its author none has more powerfully and more permanently taken hold of the imagination of its readers. Though he conjured up only pictures familiar to us from the aspect of our own streets and our own homes, he too wielded a wizard's wand.

After the success of *Dombey*, it might have seemed that nothing further was wanting to crown the prosperity of Dickens' literary career. While the publication of this

story was in progress he had concluded arrangements for the issue of his collected writings, in a cheap edition, which began in the year 1847, and which he dedicated "to the English people, in whose approval, if the books be true in spirit, they will live, and out of whose memory, if they be false, they will very soon die." He who could thus proudly appeal to posterity was already, beyond all dispute, the people's chosen favourite among its men of letters. That position he was not to lose so long as he lived; but even at this time the height had not been reached to which (in the almost unanimous judgment of those who love his writings) he was in his next work to attain.

CHAPTER IV.

DAVID COPPERFIELD.

1847–1851.

THE five years, reckoned roughly, from the beginning of 1847 to the close of 1851, were most assuredly the season in which the genius of Dickens produced its richest and rarest fruit. When it opened he was still at work upon *Dombey and Son*; towards its end he was already engaged upon the earliest portions of *Bleak House*. And it was during the interval that he produced a book cherished by himself with an affection differing in kind, as well as in degree, from the common fondness of an author for his literary offspring, and a pearl without a peer among the later fictions of our English school—*David Copperfield*. To this period also belong, it is true, not a few lesser productions of the same ready pen; for the last of his Christmas books was written in 1848, and in 1850 his weekly periodical, *Household Words*, began to run its course. There was much play too in these busy years, but all more or less of the kind which his good-humoured self-irony afterwards very correctly characterised:

"Play!" said Thomas Idle. "Here is a man goes systematically tearing himself to pieces, and putting himself through an incessant course of training as if he were always under articles

to fight a match for the champion's belt, and he calls it 'Play.' Play!" exclaimed Thomas Idle, scornfully contemplating his one boot in the air; "you can't play. You don't know what it is. You make work of everything!"

"A man," added the same easy philosopher, "who can do nothing by halves appears to me to be a fearful man." And as at all times in Dickens' life, so most emphatically in these years when his physical powers seemed ready to meet every demand, and the elasticity of his mind seemed equal to every effort, he did nothing by halves. Within this short space of time, not only did he write his best book, and conduct a weekly journal of solid merit through its most trying stage, but he also established his reputation as one of the best "unpolitical" speakers in the country; and as an amateur actor and manager successfully weathered what may be called three theatrical seasons, to the labours and glories of which it would be difficult to find a parallel even in the records of that most exacting of all social amusements. One likes to think of him in these years of vigorous manhood, no longer the fair youth with the flowing locks of Maclise's charming portrait, but not yet, I suppose, altogether the commanding and rather stern presence of later years. Mr. Frith's portrait was not painted till 1859, by which time the face occasionally had a more set expression, and the entire personality a more weather-beaten appearance than this well-known picture suggests. But even eight years before this date, when Dickens was acting in Lord Lytton's comedy the part of a young man of mode, Mr. Sala's well-known comparison of his outward man to "some prosperous sea-captain home from a sea-voyage," was thought applicable to him by another shrewd observer, Mr. R. H. Horne, who says that, fashionable "make-up"

notwithstanding, "he presented a figure that would have made a good portrait of a Dutch privateer after having taken a capital prize." And in 1856, Ary Scheffer, to whom when sitting for his portrait he had excused himself for being a difficult subject, "received the apology as strictly his due, and said with a vexed air: 'At this moment, *mon cher* Dickens, you look more like an energetic Dutch admiral than anything else;' for which I apologised again." In 1853, in the sympathetic neighbourhood of Boulogne, he was "growing a moustache," and, by 1856, a beard of the *Henri Quatre* type had been added; but even before that time we may well believe that he was, as Mr. Sala says, "one of the few men whose individuality was not effaced by the mournful conventionality of evening dress." Even in morning dress he unconsciously contrived, born actor as he was, to have something unusual about him; and, if report speaks the truth, even at the seaside, when most prodigal of ease, he was careful to dress the character.

The five years of which more especially I am speaking, brought him repeatedly face to face with the public, and within hearing of the applause that was becoming more and more of a necessity to him. They were thus unmistakeably among the very happiest years of his life. The shadow that was to fall upon his home can hardly yet have been visible even in the dim distance. For this the young voices were too many and too fresh around him behind the garden-wall in Devonshire Terrace, and among the autumnal corn on the cliffs at Broadstairs. "They are all in great force," he writes to his wife, in September, 1850, and "much excited with the expectation of receiving you on Friday;" and I only wish I had space to quote the special report sent on this occasion to

the absent mother concerning her precocious three-year-old. What sorrowful experiences he in these years underwent, were such as few men escape among the chances of life. In 1848 he lost the sister who had been the companion of his earliest days, and three years later his father, whom he had learnt to respect as well as love. Not long afterwards his little Dora, the youngest of his flock, was suddenly taken from him. Meanwhile, his old friends clung to him. Indeed, I never heard that he lost the affection of anyone who had been attached to him; and though the circle of his real intimates was never greatly widened, yet he was on friendly or even familiar terms with many whose names belong to the history of their times. Among these were the late Lord Lytton—then Sir Edward Bulwer Lytton—whose splendid abilities were still devoted mainly to literary labours, and between whom and Dickens there were more points of contrast than might at first sight appear. Of Thackeray, too, he seems to have been coming to know more; and with Leech, more especially during a summer sojourn of both their families at Bonchurch, in 1849, he grew intimate. Mr. Monckton Milnes—then, and since as Lord Houghton, *semper amicus, semper hospes* both to successful merit and to honest endeavour—Lord Carlisle, and others who adorned the great world under more than one of its aspects, were of course welcome friends and acquaintances; and even Carlyle occasionally found his way to the house of his stanch admirer, though he might declare that he was, in the language of Mr. Peggotty's housekeeper, "a lorn lone creature, and everything went contrairy with him."

It is not very easy to describe the personal habits of a man who is found seeing the spring in at Brighton and the autumn out at Broadstairs, and in the interval

"strolling" through the chief towns of the kingdom at the head of a large company of ladies and gentlemen, according to the description which he put into Mrs. Gamp's mouth, "with a great box of papers under his arm, a-talking to everybody wery indistinct, and exciting of himself dreadful." But since under ordinary circumstances he made, even in outward matters and arrangements of detail, a home for himself wherever he was, and as a rule cared little for the society of companions whose ideas and ways of life were foreign to his own, certain habits had become second nature to him, and to others he adhered with sophistical tenacity. He was an early riser, if for no other reason, because every man in whose work imagination plays its part must sometimes be alone; and Dickens has told us that there was to him something incomparably solemn in the still solitude of the morning. But it was only exceptionally, and when hard pressed by the necessities of his literary labours, that he wrote before breakfast; in general he was contented with the ordinary working hours of the morning, not often writing after luncheon, and, except in early life, never in the evening. Ordinarily, when engaged on a work of fiction, he considered three of his not very large MS. pages a good, and four an excellent, day's work; and, while very careful in making his corrections clear and unmistakeable, he never rewrote what a morning's labour had ultimately produced. On the other hand, he was frequently slow in beginning a story, being, as he himself says, affected by something like despondency at such times, or, as he elsewhere humorously puts it, "going round and round the idea, as you see a bird in his cage go about and about his sugar before he touches it." A temperate liver, he was at the same time a zealous

devotee of bodily exercise. He had not as yet given up riding, and is found, in 1848, spending the whole of a March day, with Forster, Leech, and Mark Lemon, in riding over every part of Salisbury Plain. But walking exercise was at once his forte and his fanaticism; he is said to have constructed for himself a theory that, to every portion of the day given to intellectual labour should correspond an equal number of hours spent in walking; and frequently no doubt he gave up his morning's chapter before he had begun it, "entirely persuading himself that he was under a moral obligation" to do his twenty miles on the road. By day he found in the London thoroughfares stimulative variety, and at a later date he states it to be "one of his fancies that even his idlest walk must have its appointed destination;" and by night, in seasons of intellectual excitement, he found in these same streets the refreshment of isolation among crowds. But the walks he loved best were long stretches on the cliffs or across the downs by the sea, where, following the track of his "breathers," one half expects to meet him coming along against the wind at four-and-a-half miles an hour, the very embodiment of energy and brimful of life.

And besides this energy he carried with him, wheresoever he pitched his tent, what was the second cause of his extraordinary success in so much of the business of life as it fell to him to perform. He hated disorder as Sir Artegall hated injustice; and if there was anything against which he took up his parable with burning indignation, it was slovenliness, and half-done work, and "shoddiness" of all kinds. His love of order made him always the most regular of men. "Everything with him," Miss Hogarth told me, "went as by clockwork; his movements, his absences from home, and the times of his return

were all fixed beforehand, and it was seldom that he failed to adhere to what he had fixed." Like most men endowed with a superfluity of energy, he prided himself on his punctuality; he could not live in a room or in a house till he had put every piece of furniture into its proper place, nor could he begin to work till all his writing-gear was at hand, with no item missing or misplaced. Yet he did not, like so many, combine with these habits and tendencies a saving disposition; "no man," he said of himself, "attaches less importance to the possession of money, or less disparagement to the want of it, than I do." His circumstances, though easy, were never such as to warrant a display to which perhaps certain qualities of his character might have inclined him; even at a much later date he described himself—rather oddly perhaps—as "a man of moderate savings, always supporting a very expensive public position." But, so far as I can gather, he never had a reasonable want which he could not and did not satisfy, though at the same time he cared for very few of the pursuits or amusements that are apt to drain much larger resources than his. He never had to think twice about country or seaside quarters; wherever it might suit his purpose or fancy to choose them, at one of his south-coast haunts or, for his wife's health, at Malvern, thither he went; and when the whim seized him for a trip *en garçon* to any part of England or to Paris, he had only to bid the infallible Anne pack his trunk. He was a provident as well as an affectionate father; but the cost of educating his numerous family seems to have caused him no serious anxiety; in 1849 he sent his eldest son to Eton. And while he had sworn a kind of *vendetta* against begging-letter writers, and afterwards used to parry the attacks of his pertinacious enemies by means

of carefully-prepared written forms, his hand seems to have been at all times open for charity.

Some of these personal characteristics of Dickens were to be brought out with remarkable vividness during the period of his life which forms the special subject of the present chapter. Never was he more thoroughly himself than as a theatrical manager and actor, surrounded by congenial associates. He starred it to his heart's content at the country seat of his kind Lausanne friends, Mr. and Mrs. Watson. But the first occasion on which he became publicly known in both the above-mentioned capacities, was the reproduction of the amateur performance of *Every Man in his Humour*. This time the audiences were to be in Manchester and Liverpool, where it was hoped that a golden harvest might be reaped for Leigh Hunt, who was at that time in sore straits. As it chanced, a civil-list pension was just about this time—1847—conferred upon the most unaffectedly graceful of all modern writers of English verse. It was accordingly resolved to divert part of the proceeds of the undertaking in favour of a worthy playwright, the author of *Paul Pry*. The comedy was acted with brilliant success at Manchester, on July 26th, and at Liverpool two days later; and then the "managerial miseries," which Dickens had enjoyed with his whole heart and soul, were over for the nonce. Already, however, in the following year, 1848, an excellent reason was found for their recommencement; and nine performances of Ben Jonson's play, this time alternated with *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, were given by Dickens' "company of amateurs"—the expression is his own—at the Haymarket, and in the theatres of five of the largest towns in the kingdom, for the benefit of Sheridan Knowles. Nothing could have been more honourable

than Dickens' readiness to serve the interests of an actor with whom, but for his own generous temper, he would only a few months before have been involved in a wordy quarrel. In *The Merry Wives*, the manager acted Justice Shallow to Mark Lemon's Falstaff. Dame Quickly was played by Mrs. Cowden Clarke, who speedily became a favourite correspondent of Dickens. But the climax of these excitements arrived in the year of wonders, 1851, when, with a flourish of trumpets resounding through the world of fashion as well as of letters, the comedy, *Not so Bad as We Seem*, written for the occasion by Bulwer Lytton, was performed under Dickens' management at Devonshire House, in the presence of the Queen, for the benefit of the Guild of Literature and Art. The object was a noble one, though the ultimate result of the scheme has been an almost pitiable failure; and nothing was spared, by the host or the actors, to make the effect worthy of it. While some of the most popular men of letters took parts in the clever and effective play, its scenery was painted by some of the most eminent among English artists. Dickens was fired by the ardour of the enterprise, and proceeding on his principle that the performance could not possibly "be a success if the smallest peppercorn of arrangement were omitted," covered himself and his associates with glory. From Devonshire House play and theatre were transferred to the Hanover Square Rooms, where the farce of *Mr. Nightingale's Diary* was included in the performance, of which some vivid reminiscences have been published by one of the few survivors of that noble company, Mr. R. H. Horne. Other accounts corroborate his recollections of the farce, which was the triumph of "gag," and would have been reckoned a

masterpiece in the old *commedia dell' arte*. The characters played by Dickens included Sam Weller turned waiter; a voluble barrister by the name of Mr. Gabblewig; a hypochondriac suffering from a prescription of mustard and milk; the Gampish mother of a charity-boy (Mr. Egg); and her brother, a stone-deaf old sexton, who appeared to be "at least ninety years of age." The last-named assumption seems to have been singularly effective:

"After repeated shoutings ('It's of no use whispering to me, young man') of the word 'buried'—'*Brewed!* oh yes, sir, I have brewed many a good gallon of ale in my time. The last batch I brewed, sir, was finer than all the rest—the best ale ever brewed in the county. It used to be called in our parts here, "Samson with his hair on!" in allusion'—here his excitement shook the tremulous frame into coughing and wheezing—'in allusion to its great strength.' He looked from face to face to see if his feat was duly appreciated, and his venerable jest understood by those around; and then, softly repeating, with a glimmering smile, 'in allusion to its great strength!' he turned about, and made his exit, like one moving towards his own grave while he thinks he is following the funeral of another."

From London the company travelled into the country, where their series of performances was not closed till late in the succeeding year, 1852. Dickens was from first to last the manager, and the ruling spirit of the undertaking. Among his latest recruits, Mr. Wilkie Collins is specially mentioned by Forster. The acquaintance which thus began soon ripened into a close and lasting friendship, and became, with the exception of that with Forster himself, the most important of all Dickens' personal intimacies for the history of his career as an author.

Speech-making was not in quite the same sense, or to quite the same degree, as amateur acting and managing, a

voluntary labour on Dickens' part. Not that he was one of those to whom the task of occasionally addressing a public audience is a pain or even a burden. Indeed, he was a born orator; for he possessed both that strong and elastic imaginative power which enables a man to place himself at once in sympathy with his audience, and that gift of speech, pointed, playful, and where necessary impetuous, which pleads well in any assembly for any cause. He had moreover the personal qualifications of a handsome manly presence, a sympathetic eye, and a fine flexible voice which, as his own hints on public speaking show, he managed with care and intelligence. He had, he says, "fought with beasts (oratorically) in divers arenas." But though a speaker in whom ease bred force, and force ease, he was the reverse of a mere builder of phrases and weaver of periods. "Mere holding forth," he declared, "I utterly detest, abominate, and abjure." His innate hatred of talk for mere talk's sake had doubtless been intensified by his early reporting experiences, and by what had become his stereotyped notion of our parliamentary system. At the Administration Reform meeting in 1855 he stated that he had never before attended a public meeting. On the other hand, he had been for already several years in great request for meetings of a different kind, concerned with the establishment or advancement of educational or charitable institutions in London and other great towns of the country. His addresses from the chair were often of remarkable excellence; and this not merely because crowded halls and increased subscription-lists were their concomitants, and because the happiness of his humour—never out of season, and even on such occasions often singularly prompt—sent everyone home in good spirits.

In these now forgotten speeches on behalf of Athenæums and Mechanics' Institutes, or of actors' and artists' and newsmen's charities, their occasional advocate never appears occasional. Instead of seeming to have just mastered his brief while the audience was taking its seats, or to have become for the first time deeply interested in his subject in the interval between his soup and his speech, the cause which Dickens pleads never has in him either an imperfectly informed or a half-indifferent representative. Among many charming illustrations of a vein of oratory in which he has been equalled by very few if by any public men of his own or the succeeding generation, I will instance only one address, though it belongs to a considerably later date than the time of *David Copperfield*. Nothing, however, that Dickens has ever written—not even *David Copperfield* itself—breathes a tenderer sympathy for the weakness of unprotected childhood than the beautiful little speech delivered by him on February 9th, 1858, on behalf of the London Hospital for Sick Children. Beginning with some touches of humour concerning the spoilt children of the rich, the orator goes on to speak of the "spoilt children" of the poor, illustrating with concrete directness, both the humorous and the pathetic side of his subject, and after a skilfully introduced sketch of the capabilities and wants of the "infant institution" for which he pleads, ending with an appeal, founded on a fancy of Charles Lamb, to the support of the "dream-children" belonging to each of his hearers: "the dear child you love, the dearer child you have lost, the child you might have had, the child you certainly have been." This is true eloquence, of a kind which aims at something besides opening purse-strings. In 1851, he had spoken in the same vein of mixed humour

and pathos on behalf of his clients, the poor actors, when, unknown to him, a little child of his own was lying dead at home. But in these years of his life, as indeed at all times, his voice was at the service of such causes as had his sympathy; it was heard at Birmingham, at Leeds, at Glasgow; distance was of little moment to his energetic nature; and as to trouble, how could he do anything by halves?

There was yet a third kind of activity, distinct from that of literary work pure and simple, in which Dickens in these years for the first time systematically engaged. It has been seen how he had long cherished the notion of a periodical conducted by himself, and marked by a unity of design which should make it in a more than ordinary sense his own paper. With a genius like his, which attached itself to the concrete, very much depended at the outset upon the choice of a title. *The Cricket* could not serve again, and for some time the notion of an omnipresent *Shadow*, with something, if possible, tacked to it "expressing the notion of its being cheerful, useful, and always welcome," seemed to promise excellently. For a rather less ambitious design, however, a rather less ambitious title was sought, and at last fortunately found, in the phrase, rendered proverbial by Shakespeare, "*Household Words*." "We hope," he wrote a few weeks before the first number appeared, on March 30th, 1850, "to do some solid good, and we mean to be as cheery and pleasant as we can." But *Household Words*, which in form and in cost was to be a paper for the multitude, was to be something more than agreeable and useful and cheap. It was to help in casting out the many devils that had taken up their abode in popular periodical literature, the "bastards of the Mountain," and the foul fiends who

dealt in infamous scurrility, and to do this with the aid of a charm more potent than the most lucid argument and the most abundant facts. "In the bosoms of the young and old, of the well-to-do and of the poor," says the *Preliminary Word* in the first number, "we would tenderly cherish that light of fancy which is inherent in the human breast." To this purpose it was the editor's constant and deliberate endeavour to bind his paper. "KEEP 'HOUSEHOLD WORDS' IMAGINATIVE!" is the "solemn and continual Conductorial Injunction" which three years after the foundation of the journal he impresses, with the artful aid of capitals, upon his faithful coadjutor, Mr. W. H. Wills. In his own contributions he was not forgetful of this maxim, and the most important of them, the serial story, *Hard Times*, was written with the express intention of pointing it as a moral.

There are, I suppose, in addition to the many mysterious functions performed by the editor of a literary journal, two of the very highest significance; in the first place, the choice of his contributors, and then, if the expression may be used, the management of them. In both respects but one opinion seems to exist of Dickens' admirable qualities as an editor. Out of the many contributors to *Household Words*, and its kindred successor, *All the Year Round*—some of whom are happily still among living writers—it would be invidious to select for mention a few in proof of the editor's discrimination. But it will not be forgotten that the first number of the earlier journal contained the beginning of a tale by Mrs. Gaskell, whose name will long remain a household word in England, both North and South. And a periodical could hardly be deemed one-sided which included among its contributors scholars and writers of

the distinction belonging to the names of Forster and Mr. Henry Morley, together with humorous observers of men and things such as Mr. Sala and Albert Smith. On the other hand, *Household Words* had what every literary journal ought to have, an individuality of its own; and this individuality was of course that of its editor. The mannerisms of Dickens' style afterwards came to be imitated by some among his contributors; but the general unity perceptible in the journal was the natural and legitimate result of the fact that it stood under the independent control of a vigorous editor, assisted by a sub-editor—Mr. W. H. Wills—of rare trustworthiness. Dickens had a keen eye for selecting subjects from a definite field, a ready skill for shaping, if necessary, the articles accepted by him, and a genius for providing them with expressive and attractive titles. Fiction and poetry apart, these articles have mostly a social character or bearing, although they often deviate into the pleasant paths of literature or art, and usually, but by no means always, the scenes or associations with which they connect themselves are of England, English.

Nothing could surpass the unflagging courtesy shown by Dickens towards his contributors, great or small, old or new, and his patient interest in their endeavours, while he conducted *Household Words*, and afterwards *All the Year Round*. Of this there is evidence enough to make the records of the office in Wellington Street a pleasant page in the history of journalism. He valued a good workman when he found him, and was far too reasonable and generous to put his own stamp upon all the good metal that passed through his hands. Even in his Christmas Numbers he left the utmost possible freedom

to his associates. Where he altered or modified it was as one who had come to know the pulse of the public; and he was not less considerate with novices, than he was frank and explicit with experts, in the writer's art. The articles in his journal being anonymous, he was not tempted to use names as baits for the public, though many who wrote for him were men or women of high literary reputation. And he kept his doors open. While some editors deem it their duty to ward off would-be contributors, as some ministers of state think it theirs to get rid of deputations, Dickens sought to ignore instead of jealously guarding the boundaries of professional literature. Nothing in this way ever gave him greater delight than to have welcomed and published several poems sent to him under a feigned name, but which he afterwards discovered to be the first-fruits of the charming poetical talent of Miss Adelaide Procter, the daughter of his old friend "Barry Cornwall."

In the preparation of his own papers, or of those which, like the Christmas Numbers, he composed conjointly with one or more of his familiars, he spared no labour and thought no toil too great. At times, of course, he, like all periodical writers who cannot be merry every Wednesday or caustic every Saturday, felt the pressure of the screw—"as to two comic articles," he exclaims on one occasion, "or two any sort of articles, out of me, that's the intensest extreme of no-goism." But, as a rule, no great writer ever ran more gaily under his self-imposed yoke. His "Uncommercial Travels," as he at a later date happily christened them, familiarised him with whatever parts or aspects of London his long walks had still left unexplored; and he was as conscientious in hunting up the details of a complicated subject as in finding out the secrets of an obscure pursuit or trade.

Accomplished antiquarians and "commissioners" assisted him in his labours; but he was no *roi fainéant* on the editorial sofa which he so complacently describes. Whether he was taking *A Walk in a Workhouse*, or knocking at the door of another with the supernumerary waifs in Whitechapel, or *On* (night) *Duty with Inspector Field* among the worst of the London slums, he was always ready to see with his own eyes; after which the photographic power of his pen seemed always capable of doing the rest. Occasionally he treats topics more properly journalistic, but he is most delightful when he takes his ease in his *English* or his *French Watering Place*, or carries his readers with him on *A Flight to Paris*, bringing before them, as it were, in breathless succession, every inch of the familiar journey. Happiest of all is he when, with his friend Mr. Wilkie Collins—this, however, not until the autumn of 1857—he starts on *The Lazy Tour of Two Idle Apprentices*, the earlier chapters of which furnish some of the best specimens of his most humorous prose. Neither at the same time does he forget himself to enforce the claim of his journal to strengthen the imaginary side of literature. In an assumed character he allows a veteran poet to carry him *By Rail to Parnassus*, and even good-humouredly banters an old friend, George Cruikshank, for having committed *Frauds on the Fairies* by re-editing legendary lore with the view of inculcating the principle of Total Abstinence.

Such, then, were some of the channels in which the intense mental and physical energy of Dickens found a congenial outlet in these busy years. Yet in the very midst of this multifarious activity the mysterious and controlling power of his genius enabled him to collect himself for the composition of a work of fiction which, as

I have already said, holds, and will always continue to hold, a place of its own among his works. "Of all my books," he declares, "I like this the best. It will be easily believed that I am a fond parent to every child of my fancy, and that no one can ever love that family as dearly as I love them. But, like many fond parents, I have in my heart of hearts a favourite child—and his name is DAVID COPPERFIELD!" He parted from the story with a pang, and when in after life he returned to its perusal, he was hardly able to master the emotions which it recalled; perhaps even he hardly knew what the effort of its production had cost him.

The first number of *David Copperfield* was published in May, 1849—the last in November, 1850. To judge from the difficulty which Dickens found in choosing a title for his story, of which difficulty plentiful evidence remains in MS. at South Kensington—he must have been fain to delay longer even than usual on the threshold. In the end the name of the hero evolved itself out of a series of transformations, from Trotfield and Trotbury to Copperboy, Copperstone—"Copperfull" being reserved as a *lectio varians* for Mrs. Crupp—and *Copperfield*. Then at last the pen could fall seriously to work, and, proceeding slowly at first—for the first page of the MS. contains a great number of alterations—dip itself now into black, now into blue ink, and in a small writing, already contrasting with the bolder hand of earlier days, produce page upon page of an incomparable book. No doubt what so irresistibly attracted Dickens to *David Copperfield*, and what has since fascinated many readers, more or less conscious of the secret of the charm, is the autobiographical element in the story. Until the publication of Forster's *Life*, no reader of *Copperfield* could be

aware of the pang it must have cost Dickens to lay bare, though to unsuspecting eyes, the story of experiences which he had hitherto kept all but absolutely secret, and to which his own mind could not recur without a quivering sensitiveness. No reader could trace, as the memory of Dickens always must have traced, some of the most vivid of those experiences, imbued though they were with the tints of a delightfully playful humour, in the doings and dealings of Mr. Wilkins Micawber, whose original, by a strange coincidence, was passing tranquilly away out of life, while his comic counterpart was blossoming into a whimsical immortality. And no reader could divine, what very probably even the author may hardly have ventured to confess to himself, that in the lovely little idyll of the loves of Doady and Dora—with Jip, as Dora's father might have said, intervening—there were, besides the reminiscences of an innocent juvenile amour, the vestiges of a man's unconfessed though not altogether unrepressed disappointment—the sense that "there was always something wanting." But in order to be affected by a personal or autobiographical element in a fiction or poem, it is by no means necessary to be aware of its actual bearing and character, or even of its very existence; *Amelia* would gain little by illustrative notes concerning the experiences of the first Mrs. Fielding. To excite in a work of fiction the peculiar kind of interest of which I am speaking, the existence of an autobiographical substratum need not be apparent in it, nor need its presence be even suspected. Enough, if it be *there*. But it had far better be away altogether, unless the novelist has so thoroughly fused this particular stream of metal with the mass filling his mould that the result is an integral artistic whole. Such was, however, the case with *David Copperfield*, which of

all Dickens' fictions is on the whole the most perfect as a work of art. Personal reminiscences which lay deep in the author's breast are, as effects, harmonised with local associations old and new. Thus Yarmouth, painted in the story with singular poetic truthfulness, had only quite recently been seen by Dickens for the first time, on a holiday trip. His imagination still subdued to itself all the elements with which he worked; and, whatever may be thought of the construction of this story, none of his other books equals it in that harmony of tone which no artist can secure unless by recasting all his materials.

As to the construction of *David Copperfield*, however, I frankly confess that I perceive no serious fault in it. It is a story with a plot, and not merely a string of adventures and experiences, like little Davy's old favourites upstairs at Blunderstone. In the conduct of this plot blemishes may here and there occur. The boy's flight from London, and the direction which it takes, are insufficiently accounted for. A certain amount of obscurity as well perhaps as of improbability, pervades the relations between Uriah and the victim, round whom the unspeakable slimy thing writhes and wriggles. On the other hand, the mere conduct of the story has much that is beautiful in it. Thus there is real art in the way in which the scene of Barkis' death—written with admirable moderation—prepares for the "greater loss" at hand for the mourning family. And in the entire treatment of his hero's double love story, Dickens has, to my mind, avoided that discord which—in spite of himself, jars upon the reader both in *Esmond* and in *Adam Bede*. The best constructed part of *David Copperfield* is, however, unmistakeably the story of Little Emily and her kinsfolk. This is most skilfully interwoven with the personal

experiences of David, of which—except in its very beginnings—it forms no integral part; and throughout the reader is haunted by a presentiment of the coming catastrophe, though unable to divine the tragic force and justice of its actual accomplishment. A touch altered here and there in Steerforth, with the Rosa Dartle episode excluded or greatly reduced, and this part of *David Copperfield* might challenge comparison as to workmanship with the whole literature of modern fiction.

Of the idyll of Davy and Dora—what shall I say? Its earliest stages are full of the gayest comedy. What, for instance, could surpass the history of the picnic—where was it? perhaps it was near Guildford. At that feast an imaginary rival, "Red Whisker," made the salad—how could they eat it?—and "voted himself into the charge of the wine-cellar, which he constructed, *being an ingenious beast*, in the hollow trunk of a tree." Better still are the backward ripples in the course of true love; best of all the deep wisdom of Miss Mills, in whose nature mental trial and suffering supplied, in some measure, the place of years. In the narrative of the young housekeeping, David's real trouble is most skilfully mingled with the comic woes of the situation; and thus the idyll almost imperceptibly passes into the last phase, where the clouds dissolve in a rain of tears. The genius which conceived and executed these closing scenes was touched by a pity towards the fictitious creatures of his own imagination, which melted his own heart; and thus his pathos is here irresistible.

The inventive power of Dickens in none of his other books indulged itself so abundantly in the creation of eccentric characters, but neither was it in any so admirably tempered by taste and feeling. It contains no character

which could strictly be called grotesque, unless it be little Miss Mowcher. Most of her outward peculiarities Dickens had copied from a living original, but receiving a remonstrance from the latter he good-humouredly altered the use he had intended to make of the character, and thereby spoilt what there was in it—not much in my opinion—to spoil. Mr. Dick belongs to a species of eccentric personages—mad people in a word—for which Dickens as a writer had a curious liking; but though there is consequently no true humour in this character, it helps to bring out the latent tenderness in another. David's Aunt is a figure which none but a true humorist such as Sterne or Dickens could have drawn, and she must have sprung from the author's brain armed *cap-à-pie* as she appeared in her garden before his little double. Yet even Miss Betsey Trotwood was not altogether a creation of the fancy, for at Broadstairs the locality is still pointed out where the "one great outrage of her life" was daily renewed. In the other chief characters of this story the author seems to rely entirely on natural truthfulness. He must have had many opportunities of noting the ways of seamen and fishermen, but the occupants of the old boat near Yarmouth possess the typical characteristics with which the experience and the imagination of centuries have agreed to credit the "salt" division of mankind. Again, he had had his own experience of shabby-genteel life, and of the struggle which he had himself seen a happy and a buoyant temperament maintaining against a sea of trouble. But Mr. Micawber, whatever features may have been transferred to him, is the type of a whole race of men who will not vanish from the face of the earth so long as the hope which lives eternal in the human breast is only temporarily suspended by the laws of debtor and

creditor, and is always capable of revival with the aid of a bowl of milk-punch. A kindlier and a merrier, a more humorous and a more genuine character was never conceived than this; and if anything was wanted to complete the comicality of the conception, it was the wife of his bosom with the twins at her own, and her mind made up *not* to desert Mr. Micawber. Delightful too in his way, though of a class more common in Dickens, is Tommy Traddles, the genial picture of whose married life in chambers in Gray's Inn, with the dearest girl in the world and her five sisters, including the beauty, on a visit, may have been suggested by kindly personal reminiscences of youthful days. In contrast to these characters, the shambling, fawning, villainous hypocrisy of Uriah Heep is a piece of intense and elaborate workmanship, almost cruelly done without being overdone. It was in his figures of hypocrites that Dickens' satirical power most diversely displayed itself; and by the side of Uriah Heep in this story, literally so in the prison-scene at the close, stands another species of the race, the valet Littimer, a sketch which Thackeray himself could not have surpassed.

Thus, then, I must leave the book, with its wealth of pathos and humour, with the glow of youth still tinging its pages, but with the gentler mood of manhood pervading it from first to last. The *reality* of *David Copperfield* is, perhaps, the first feature in it likely to strike the reader new to its charms; but a closer acquaintance will produce, and familiarity will enhance, the sense of its wonderful *art*. Nothing will ever destroy the popularity of a work of which it can truly be said that, while offering to his muse a gift not less beautiful than precious, its author put into it his life's blood.

CHAPTER V.

CHANGES.

1852—1858.

I HAVE spoken of both the intellectual and the physical vigour of Charles Dickens as at their height in the years of which the most enduring fruit was the most delightful of all his fictions. But there was no break in his activity after the achievement of this or any other of his literary successes, and he was never harder at work than during the seven years of which I am about to speak, although in this period also occasionally he was to be found hard at play. Its beginning saw him settled in his new and cheerfully-furnished abode at Tavistock House, of which he had taken possession in October, 1851. At its close he was master of the country residence which had been the dream of his childhood, but he had become a stranger to that tranquillity of mind without which no man's house is truly his home. Gradually, but surely, things had then, or a little before, come to such a pass that he wrote to his faithful friend: "I am become incapable of rest. I am quite confident I should rust, break and die, if I spared myself. Much better to die, doing. What I am in that way, nature made me first, and my way of life has of late, alas! confirmed." Early in 1852, the youngest of his children had been born to

him—the boy whose babyhood once more revived in him a tenderness the depth of which no eccentric humours and fantastic *sobriquets* could conceal. In May, 1858, he had separated from the mother of his children, and though self-sacrificing affection was at hand to watch over them and him, yet that domestic life of which he had become the prophet and poet to hundreds of thousands was in its fairest and fullest form at an end for himself.

In the earlier of these years, Dickens' movements were still very much of the same kind, and varied much after the same fashion as in the period described in my last chapter. In 1852 the series of amateur performances in the country was completed; but time was found for a summer residence in Camden Crescent, Dover. During his stay there, and during most of his working hours in this and the following year—the spring of which was partly spent at Brighton—he was engaged upon his new story, *Bleak House*, published in numbers dating from March, 1852, to September, 1853. "To let you into a secret," he had written to his lively friend, Miss Mary Boyle, from Dover, "I am not quite sure that I ever did like, or ever shall like anything quite so well as *Copperfield*. But I foresee, I think, some very good things in *Bleak House*." There is no reason to believe that, by the general public, this novel was at the time of its publication a whit less favourably judged or less eagerly read than its predecessor. According to the author's own testimony, it "took extraordinarily, especially during the last five or six months" of its issue, and "retained its immense circulation from the first, beating dear old *Copperfield* by a round ten thousand or more." To this day the book has its stanch friends, some of whom would perhaps be slow to confess by which of the elements in the story they are most forcibly attracted. On the other

hand, *Bleak House* was probably the first of Dickens' works which furnished a suitable text to a class of censors whose precious balms have since descended upon his head with constant reiteration. The power of amusing being graciously conceded to the "man of genius," his book was charged with "absolute want of construction," and with being a heterogeneous compound made up of a meagre and melodramatic story, and a number of "odd folks that have to do with a long Chancery suit." Of the characters themselves it was asserted that, though in the main excessively funny, they were more like caricatures of the stage than studies from nature; some approval was bestowed upon particular figures, but rather as types of the influence of externals than as real individualities; and while the character of the poor crossing-sweeper was generously praised, it was regretted that Dickens should never have succeeded in drawing "a man or woman whose lot is cast among the high-born or wealthy." He belonged, unfortunately, "in literature to the same class as his illustrator, Hablot Browne, in design, though he far surpasses the illustrator in range and power." In other words, he was essentially a caricaturist.

As applied to *Bleak House*, with which I am at present alone concerned, this kind of censure was in more ways than one unjust. So far as constructive skill was concerned, the praise given by Forster to *Bleak House* may be considered excessive; but there can be no doubt that, as compared, not with *Pickwick* and *Nickleby*, but with its immediate predecessor, *David Copperfield*, this novel exhibits a decided advance in that respect. In truth, Dickens in *Bleak House* for the first time emancipated himself from that form of novel which, in accordance with his great eighteenth-century favourites, he had

hitherto more or less consciously adopted—the novel of adventure, of which the person of the hero, rather than the machinery of the plot, forms the connecting element. It may be that the influence of Mr. Wilkie Collins was already strong upon him, and that the younger writer, whom Dickens was about this time praising for his unlikeness to the "conceited idiots who suppose that volumes are to be tossed off like pancakes," was already teaching something to, as well as learning something from, the elder. It may also be that the criticism which as editor of *Household Words* Dickens was now in the habit of judiciously applying to the fictions of others, unconsciously affected his own methods and processes. Certain it is that from this point of view *Bleak House* may be said to begin a new series among his works of fiction. The great Chancery suit and the fortunes of those concerned in it are not a disconnected background from which the mystery of Lady Dedlock's secret stands forth in relief; but the two main parts of the story are skilfully interwoven as in a Spanish double-plot. Nor is the success of the general action materially affected by the circumstance that the tone of Esther Summerson's diary is not altogether true. At the same time, there is indisputably some unevenness in the construction of *Bleak House*. It drags, and drags very perceptibly, in some of its earlier parts. On the other hand, the interest of the reader is strongly revived, when that popular favourite, Mr. Inspector Bucket, appears on the scene, and when, more especially in the admirably vivid narrative of Esther's journey with the detective, the nearness of the catastrophe exercises its exciting influence. Some of the machinery, moreover—such as the Smallweed family's part in the plot—is tiresome; and particular incidents are intolerably horrible or absurd—

such as, on the one hand, the spontaneous combustion (which is proved possible by the analogy of historical facts!), and on the other, the intrusion of the oil-grinding Mr. Chadband into the solemn presence of Sir Leicester Dedlock's grief. But in general the parts of the narrative are well knit together; and there is a subtle skill in the way in which the two main parts of the story converge towards their common close.

The idea of making an impersonal object like a great Chancery suit the centre round which a large and manifold group of characters revolves, seems to savour of a drama rather than of a story. No doubt the theme suggested itself to Dickens with a very real purpose, and on the basis of facts which he might well think warranted him in his treatment of it; for, true artist though he was, the thought of exposing some national defect, of helping to bring about some real reform, was always paramount in his mind over any mere literary conception. *Primâ facie*, at least, and with all due deference to Chancery judges and eminent silk gowns like Mr. Blowers, the length of Chancery suits was a real public grievance, as well as a frequent private calamity. But even as a mere artistic notion, the idea of Jarndyce *v.* Jarndyce as diversely affecting those who lived by it, those who rebelled against it, those who died of it, was in its way of unique force; and while Dickens never brought to any other of his subjects so useful a knowledge of its external details—in times gone by he had served a "Kenge and Carboys" of his own—hardly any one of those subjects suggested so wide a variety of aspects for characteristic treatment.

For never before had his versatility in drawing character filled his canvas with so multitudinous and so various a

host of personages. The legal profession, with its servitors and hangers-on of every degree, occupies the centre of the picture. In this group no figure is more deserving of admiration than that of Mr. Tulkinghorn, the eminently respectable family solicitor at whose very funeral, by a four-wheeled affliction, the goodwill of the aristocracy manifests itself. We learn very little about him, and probably care less ; but he interests us precisely as we should be interested by the real old family lawyer, about whom we might know and care equally little, were we to find him alone in the twilight, drinking his ancient port in his frescoed chamber in those fields where the shepherds play on Chancery pipes that have no stop. (Mr. Forster, by the way, omitted to point out to his readers, what the piety of American research has since put on record, that Mr. Tulkinghorn's house was a picture of the biographer's own residence.) The portrait of Mr. Vholes, who supports an unassailable but unenviable professional reputation for the sake of "the three dear girls at home," and a father whom he has to support "in the Vale of Taunton," is less attractive; but nothing could be more in its place in the story than the clammy tenacity of this legal ghoul and his "dead glove." Lower down in the great system of the law, we come upon Mr. Guppy and his fellows, the very quintessence of cockney vulgarity, seasoned with a flavour of legal sharpness without which the rankness of the mixture would be incomplete. To the legal group Miss Flite, whose original, if I remember right, used to haunt the Temple as well as the precincts of the Chancery courts, may likewise be said to belong. She is quite legitimately introduced into the story—which cannot be said of all Dickens' madmen —because her madness associates itself with its main theme.

Much admiration has been bestowed upon the figures of an eccentric by- or under-plot in this story, in which the family of the Jellybys and the august Mr. Turveydrop are, actively, or by passive endurance, engaged. The philanthropic section of *le monde où l'on s'ennuie* has never been satirised more tellingly, and, it must be added, more bitterly. Perhaps at the time of the publication of *Bleak House* the activity of our Mrs. Jellybys took a wider and more cosmopolitan sweep than in later days; for we read at the end of Esther's diary how Mrs. Jellyby "has been disappointed in Borrioboola Gha, which turned out a failure in consequence of the King of Borrioboola wanting to sell everybody—who survived the climate—for Rum; but she has taken up with the rights of women to sit in Parliament, and Caddy tells me it is a mission involving more correspondence than the old one." But Mrs. Jellyby's interference in the affairs of other people is after all hurtful only because in busying herself with theirs she forgets her own. The truly offensive benefactress of her fellow-creatures is Mrs. Pardiggle, who, maxim in mouth and tract in hand, turns everything she approaches to stone. Among her victims are her own children, including Alfred, aged five, who has been induced to take an oath "never to use tobacco in any form."

The particular vein of feeling that led Dickens to the delineation of these satirical figures was one which never ran dry with him, and which suggested some forcible-feeble satire in his very last fiction. I call it a vein of feeling only; for he could hardly have argued in cold blood that the efforts which he ridicules were not misrepresented as a whole by his satire. When poor Jo on his deathbed is "asked whether he ever knew a prayer,"

and replies that he could never make anything out of those spoken by the gentlemen who "came down Tom-all-Alone's a-prayin'," but who "mostly sed as the t'other wuns prayed wrong," the author brings a charge which he might not have found it easy to substantiate. Yet —with the exception of such isolated passages—the figure of Jo is in truth one of the most powerful protests that have been put forward on behalf of the friendless outcasts of our streets. Nor did the romantic element in the conception interfere with the effect of the realistic. If Jo, who seems at first to have been intended to be one of the main figures of the story, is in Dickens' best pathetic manner, the Bagnet family is in his happiest vein of quiet humour. Mr. Inspector Bucket, though not altogether free from mannerism, well deserves the popularity which he obtained. For this character, as the pages of *Household Words* testify, Dickens had made many studies in real life. The detective police-officer had at that time not yet become a standing figure of fiction and the drama, nor had the detective of real life begun to destroy the illusion.

Bleak House was least of all among the novels hitherto published by its author obnoxious to the charge persistently brought against him, that he was doomed to failure in his attempts to draw characters taken from any but the lower spheres of life—in his attempts, in short, to draw ladies and gentlemen. To begin with, one of the most interesting characters in the book—indeed, in its relation to the main idea of the story, the most interesting of all—is the youthful hero, if he is to be so called, Richard Carson. From the very nature of the conception, the character is passive only; but the art and feeling are in their way unsurpassed with which the gradual collapse of a fine

nature is here exhibited. Sir Leicester Dedlock, in some measure intended as a type of his class, has been condemned as wooden and unnatural; and no doubt the machinery of that part of the story in which he is concerned creaks before it gets under way. On the other hand, after the catastrophe has overwhelmed him and his house, he becomes a really fine picture, unmarred by any Grandisonianisms in either thought or phrase, of a true gentleman, bowed but not warped by distress. Sir Leicester's relatives, both dead and living; Volumnia's sprightly ancestress on the wall, and that "fair Dedlock" herself; the whole cousinhood, debilitated and otherwise, but of one mind on such points as William Buffy's blameworthy neglect of his duty *when in office*; all these make up a very probable picture of a house great enough—or thinking itself great enough—to look at the affairs of the world from the family point of view. In Lady Dedlock alone a failure must be admitted; but she, with her wicked double, the uncanny French maid Hortense, exists only for the sake of the plot.

With all its merits, *Bleak House* has little of that charm which belongs to so many of Dickens' earlier stories, and to *David Copperfield* above all. In part at least, this may be due to the excessive severity of the task which Dickens had set himself in *Bleak House*; for hardly any other of his works is constructed on so large a scale, or contains so many characters organically connected with the progress of its plot; and in part, again, to the half-didactic half-satirical purport of the story, which weighs heavily on the writer. An overstrained tone announces itself on the very first page; an opening full of power—indeed, of genius; but pitched in a key which we feel at once will not, without effort, be maintained. On the second

page the prose has actually become verse; or how else can one describe part of the following apostrophe?

"This is the Court of Chancery, which has its decaying houses and its blighted lands in every shire; which has its worn-out lunatic in every madhouse, and its dead in every churchyard; which has its ruined suitor with his slipshod heels and threadbare dress, borrowing and begging through the round of every man's acquaintance; which gives to monied might the means abundantly of wearing out the right; which so exhausts finances, patience, courage, hope; so overthrows the brain and breaks the heart, that there is not an honourable man among its practitioners who would not give—who does not often give—the warning, 'Suffer any wrong that can be done you, rather than come here!'"

It was possibly with some thought of giving to *Bleak House* also, though in a different way, the close relation to his experiences of living men to which *David Copperfield* had owed so much, that Dickens introduced into it two *portraits*. Doubtless, at first, his intention had by no means gone so far as this. His constant counsellor always disliked his mixing up in his fictitious characters any personal reminiscences of particular men, experience having shown that in such cases the whole character came out *more like* than the author was aware. Nor can Dickens himself have failed to understand how such an experiment is always tempting, and always dangerous, how it is often irreconcileable with good feeling, and quite as often with good taste. In *Bleak House*, however, it occurred to him to introduce likenesses of two living men, both more or less well known to the public and to himself; and both of individualities too clearly marked for a portrait, or even a caricature, of either to be easily mistaken. Of that art of mystification which the authors of both English and French *romans à*

clef have since practised with so much transient success, he was no master, and fortunately so: for what could be more ridiculous than that the reader's interest in a character should be stimulated, first, by its being evidently the late Lord P–lm–rst–n, or the P—— of O——, and then by its being no less evidently somebody else? It should be added that neither of the two portrait characters in *Bleak House* possesses the least importance for the conduct of the story, so that there is nothing to justify their introduction except whatever excellence may belong to them in themselves.

Lawrence Boythorn is described by Mr. Sydney Colvin as drawn from Walter Savage Landor with his intellectual greatness left out. It was of course unlikely that his intellectual greatness should be left in, the intention obviously being to reproduce what was eccentric in the ways and manner, with a suggestion of what was noble in the character, of Dickens' famous friend. Whether, had he attempted to do so, Dickens could have drawn a picture of the whole Landor, is another question. Landor, who could put into a classic dialogue that sense of the *naïf* to which Dickens is generally a stranger, yet passionately admired the most *sentimental* of all his young friend's poetic figures; and it might almost be said that the intellectual natures of the two men were drawn together by the force of contrast. They appear to have first become intimate with one another during Landor's residence at Bath—which began in 1837—and they frequently met at Gore House. At a celebration of the poet's birthday in his lodgings at Bath, so Forster tells us in his biography of Landor, "the fancy which took the form of Little Nell in the *Curiosity Shop* first dawned on the genius of its creator." In Landor's spacious mind there

was room for cordial admiration of an author, the bent of whose genius differed widely from that of his own; and he could thus afford to sympathise with his whole heart in a creation which men of much smaller intellectual build have pronounced mawkish and unreal. Dickens afterwards gave to one of his sons the names of Walter Landor; and when the old man died at last, *after* his godson, paid him an eloquent tribute of respect in *All the Year Round*. In this paper the personal intention of the character of Boythorn is avowed by implication; but though Landor esteemed and loved Dickens, it might seem matter for wonder, did not eccentrics after all sometimes cherish their own eccentricity, that his irascible nature failed to resent a rather doubtful compliment. For the character of Boythorn is whimsical rather than, in any but the earlier sense of the word, humorous. But the portrait, however imperfect, was in this instance, beyond all doubt, both kindly meant and kindly taken; though it cannot be said to have added to the attractions of the book into which it is introduced.

While no doubt ever existed as to this likeness, the case may not seem so clear with regard to the original of Harold Skimpole. It would be far more pleasant to pass by without notice the controversy—if controversy it can be called—which this character provoked; but a wrong done by one eminent man of letters to another, however unforeseen its extent may have been, and however genuine the endeavour to repair its effect, becomes part of literary history. That the original of Harold Skimpole was Leigh Hunt cannot reasonably be called into question. This assertion by no means precludes the possibility, or probability, that a second original suggested certain

features in the portrait. Nor does it contradict the substantial truthfulness of Dickens' own statement, published in *All the Year Round* after Leigh Hunt's death, on the appearance of the new edition of the *Autobiography* with Thornton Hunt's admirable introduction. While, Dickens then wrote, "he yielded to the temptation of too often making the character speak like his old friend," yet "he no more thought, God forgive him! that the admired original would ever be charged with the imaginary vices of the fictitious creature, than he had himself ever thought of charging the blood of Desdemona and Othello on the innocent Academy model who sat for Iago's leg in the picture. Even as to the mere occasional manner," he declared that he had "altered the whole of that part of the text, when two intimate friends of Leigh Hunt—both still living—discovered too strong a resemblance to his 'way.'" But, while accepting this statement, and suppressing a regret that after discovering the dangerous closeness of the resemblance Dickens should have, quite at the end of the story, introduced a satirical reference to Harold Skimpole's autobiography—Leigh Hunt's having been published only a year or two before—one must confess that the explanation only helps to prove the rashness of the offence. While intending the portrait to keep its own secret from the general public, Dickens at the same time must have wished to gratify a few keen-sighted friends. In March, 1852, he writes to Forster, evidently in reference to the apprehensions of his correspondent: "Browne has done Skimpole, and helped to make him singularly unlike the great original." The "great original" was a man for whom, both before and after this untoward incident in the relations between them, Dickens professed a warm regard, and who, to judge from

the testimony of those who knew him well,[1] and from his unaffected narrative of his own life, abundantly deserved it. A perusal of Leigh Hunt's *Autobiography* suffices to show that he used to talk in Skimpole's manner, and even to write in it; that he was at one period of his life altogether ignorant of money matters, and that he cultivated cheerfulness on principle. But it likewise shows that his ignorance of business was acknowledged by him as a misfortune in which he was very far from exulting. "Do I boast of this ignorance?" he writes. "Alas! I have no such respect for the pedantry of absurdity as that. I blush for it, and I only record it out of a sheer painful movement of conscience, as a warning to those young authors who might be led to look upon such folly as a fine thing, which at all events is what I never thought it myself." On the other hand, as his son showed, his cheerfulness, which was not inconsistent with a natural proneness to intervals of melancholy, rested on grounds which were the result of a fine as well as healthy morality. "The value of cheerful opinions," he wrote, in words embodying a moral than Dickens himself was never weary of enforcing, "is inestimable; they will retain a sort of heaven round a man, when everything else might fail him, and consequently they ought to be religiously inculcated upon his children." At the same time, no quality was more conspicuous in his life than his readiness for hard work, even under the most depressing circumstances; and no feature was more marked in his moral character than his

[1] Among these is Mr. Alexander Ireland, the author of the *Bibliography of Leigh Hunt and Hazlitt*, who has kindly communicated to me part of his collections concerning the former. The tittle-tattle against Leigh Hunt repeated by Lord Macaulay is, on the face of it, unworthy of notice.

conscientiousness. "In the midst of the sorest temptations," Dickens wrote of him, "he maintained his honesty unblemished by a single stain; and in all public and private transactions he was the very soul of truth and honour." To mix up with the outward traits of such a man the detestable obliquities of Harold Skimpole was an experiment paradoxical even as a mere piece of character-drawing. The merely literary result is a failure, while a wound was needlessly inflicted, if not upon Leigh Hunt himself, at least upon all who cherished his friendship or good name. Dickens seems honestly and deeply to have regretted what he had done, and the extremely tasteful little tribute to Leigh Hunt's poetic gifts, which, some years before the death of the latter, Dickens wrote for *Household Words*,[1] must have partaken of the nature of an *amende honorable*. Neither his subsequent repudiation of unfriendly intentions, nor his earlier exertions on Leigh Hunt's behalf, are to be overlooked, but they cannot undo a mistake which forms an unfortunate incident in Dickens' literary life, singularly free though that life as a whole is from the miseries of personal quarrels, and all the pettinesses with which the world of letters is too familiar.

While Dickens was engaged upon a literary work such as would have absorbed the intellectual energies of most men, he not only wrote occasionally for his journal, but also dictated for publication in it the successive portions of a book altogether outside his usual range of authorship. This was *A Child's History of England*, the only one of his works that was not written by his own hand. A history of England, written by Charles Dickens for his own or anyone else's children, was sure to be a different work from one written under similar circumstances by

[1] *By Rail to Parnassus*, June 16, 1855.

Mr. Freeman or the late M. Guizot. The book, though it cannot be called a success, is however by no means devoid of interest. Just ten years earlier he had written, and printed, a history of England for the benefit of his eldest son, then a hopeful student of the age of five, which was composed, as he informed Douglas Jerrold at the time, "in the exact spirit" of that advanced politician's paper, "for I don't know what I should do if he were to get hold of any Conservative or High Church notions; and the best way of guarding against any such horrible result is, I take it, to wring the parrots' necks in his very cradle." The *Child's History of England* is written in the same spirit, and illustrates more directly, and, it must be added, more coarsely than any of Dickens' other works, his hatred of ecclesiasticism of all kinds. Thus, the account of Dunstan is pervaded by a prejudice which is the fruit of anything but knowledge; Edward the Confessor is "the dreary old" and "the maudlin Confessor;" and the Pope and what belongs to him are treated with a measure of contumely which would have satisfied the heart of Leigh Hunt himself. To be sure, if King John is dismissed as a "miserable brute," King Henry the Eighth is not more courteously designated as a "blot of blood and grease upon the history of England." On the other hand it could hardly be but that certain passages of the national story should be well told by so great a master of narrative; and though the strain in which parts of the history of Charles the Second are recounted strikes one as hardly suitable to the young, to whom irony is in general *caviare* indeed, yet there are touches both in the story of "this merry gentleman"—a designation which almost recalls Fagin—and elsewhere in the book not unworthy of its author. Its patriotic spirit

is quite as striking as its radicalism; and vulgar as some of its expressions must be called, there is a pleasing glow in the passage on King Alfred, which declares the "English-Saxon" character to have been "the greatest character among the nations of the earth;" and there is a yet nobler enthusiasm, such as it would indeed be worth any writer's while to infuse into the young, in the passionate earnestness with which, by means of the story of Agincourt, the truth is enforced that "nothing can make war otherwise than horrible."

This book must have been dictated, and some at least of the latter portion of *Bleak House* written, at Boulogne, where, after a spring sojourn at Brighton, Dickens spent the summer of 1853, and where were also passed the summers of 1854 and 1856. Boulogne, where Le Sage's last years were spent, was *Our French Watering-place*, so graphically described in a paper in *Household Words* as a companion picture to the old familiar Broadstairs. The family were comfortably settled on a green hill-side close to the town, "in a charming garden in a very pleasant country," with "excellent light wines on the premises, French cookery, millions of roses, two cows—for milk-punch—vegetables cut for the pot, and handed in at the kitchen window; five summer-houses, fifteen fountains—with no water in 'em—and thirty-seven clocks—keeping, as I conceive, Australian time, having no reference whatever to the hours on this side of the globe." The energetic owner of the Villa des Moulineaux was the "M. Loyal Devasseur" of *Our French Watering-place* — jovial, convivial, genial, sentimental too as a Buonapartist and a patriot. In 1854 the same obliging personage housed the Dickens family in another abode at the top of the hill, close to the famous Napoleonic column;

but in 1856 they came back to the Moulineaux. The former year had been an exciting one for Englishmen in France, with royal visits to and fro to testify to the *entente cordiale* between the governments. Dickens, notwithstanding his humorous assertions, was only moderately touched by the Sebastopol fever; but when a concrete problem came before him in the shape of a festive demonstration, he addressed himself to it with the irrepressible ardour of the born stage-manager. "In our own proper illumination," he writes on the occasion of the Prince Consort's visit to the camp at Boulogne, "I laid on all the servants, all the children now at home, all the visitors, one to every window, with everything ready to light up on the ringing of a big dinner-bell by your humble correspondent. St. Peter's on Easter Monday was the result."

Of course, at Boulogne, Dickens was cut off neither from his business nor from his private friends. His hospitable invitations were as urgent to his French villa in the summer as to his London house in the winter, and on both sides of the water the *Household Words* familiars were as sure of a welcome from their chief. During his absences from London he could have had no trustier lieutenant than Mr. W. H. Wills, with whom, being always ready to throw himself into a part, he corresponded in an amusing paragraphed semi-official style. And neither in his working nor in his leisure hours had he by this time any more cherished companion than Mr. Wilkie Collins, whose progress towards brilliant success he was watching with the keenest and kindliest interest. With him and his old friend Augustus Egg, Dickens, in October, 1853, started on a tour to Switzerland and Italy, in the course of which

he saw more than one old friend, and revisited more than one known scene—ascending Vesuvius with Mr. Layard and drinking punch at Rome with David Roberts. It would be absurd to make any lofty demands upon the brief records of a holiday journey; and, for my part, I would rather think of Dickens assiduous over his Christmas number at Rome and at Venice, than weigh his moralisings about the electric telegraph running through the Coliseum. His letters written to his wife during this trip are bright and gay, and it was certainly no roving bachelor who "kissed almost all the children he encountered in remembrance of the sweet faces" of his own, and "talked to all the mothers who carried them." By the middle of December the travellers were home again, and before the year was out he had read to large audiences at Birmingham, on behalf of a public institution, his favourite Christmas stories of the *Christmas Carol* and *The Cricket on the Hearth*. As yet, however, his mind was not seriously intent upon any labours but those proper to his career as an author, and the year 1854 saw, between the months of April and August, the publication in his journal of a new story, which is among the most characteristic, though not among the most successful, of his works of fiction.

In comparison with most of Dickens' novels, *Hard Times* is contained within a narrow compass; and this with the further necessity of securing to each successive small portion of the story a certain immediate degree of effectiveness, accounts, in some measure, for the peculiarity of the impression left by this story upon many of its readers. Short as the story relatively is, few of Dickens' fictions were elaborated with so much care. He had not intended to write a new story for a twelvemonth, when, as he says,

"the idea laid hold of him by the throat in a very violent manner," and the labour, carried on under conditions of peculiar irksomeness, "used him up," after a quite unaccustomed fashion. The book thus acquired a precision of form and manner which commends it to the French school of criticism rather than to lovers of English humour in its ampler forms and more flowing moods. At the same time, the work has its purpose so visibly imprinted on its front, as almost to forbid our regarding it in the first instance apart from the moral which avowedly it is intended to inculcate This moral, by no means new with Dickens, has both a negative and a positive side. "Do not harden your hearts," is the negative injunction, more especially do not harden them against the promptings of that human kindness which should draw together man and man, old and young, rich and poor; and keep your sympathies fresh by bringing nourishment to them through channels which prejudice or short-sightedness would fain narrow or stop up. This hortatory purpose assumes the form of invective and even of angry menace; and "utilitarian economists, skeletons of schoolmasters, commissioners of fact, genteel and used-up infidels, gabblers of many little dog's-eared creeds" are warned: "The poor you have always with you. Cultivate in them, while there is yet time, the utmost graces of the fancies and affections, to adorn their lives, so much in need of ornament; or, in the day of your triumph, when romance is utterly driven out of their souls, and they and a bare existence stand face to face, reality will take a wolfish turn, and make an end of you."

No authority, however eminent, not even Mr. Ruskin's, is required to teach reflecting minds the infinite

importance of the principles which *Hard Times* was intended to illustrate. Nor is it of much moment whether the illustrations are always exact; whether the "Commissioners of Facts" have reason to protest that the unimaginative character of their processes does not necessarily imply an unimaginative purpose in their ends; whether there is any actual Coketown in existence within a hundred miles of Manchester; or whether it suffices that "everybody knew what was meant, but every cotton-spinning town said it was the other cotton-spinning town." The chief personal grievance of Stephen Blackpool has been removed or abated, but the "muddle" is not yet altogether cleared up which prevents the nation and the "national dustmen," its lawgivers, from impartially and sympathetically furthering the interest of all classes. In a word, the moral of *Hard Times* has not yet lost its force, however imperfect or unfair the method may have been in which it is urged in the book.

Unfortunately, however, a work of art with a didactic purpose is only too often prone to exaggerate what seems of special importance for the purpose in question, and to heighten contrasts which seem likely to put it in the clearest light. "Thomas Gradgrind, sir," who announces himself with something of the genuine Lancashire roll, and his system are a sound and a laughable piece of satire to begin with, only here and there marred by the satirist's imperfect knowledge of the details which he caricatures. The "Manchester School," which the novel strives to expose, is in itself to a great extent a figment of the imagination, which to this day serves to round many a hollow period in oratory and journalism. Who, it may fairly be asked, were the parliamentary politicians satirised in the member for Coketown, deaf and blind to

any consideration but the multiplication table. But in any case the cause hardly warrants one of its consequences as depicted in the novel—the utter brutalisation of a stolid nature like "the Whelp's." When Gradgrind's son is about to be shipped abroad out of reach of the penalties of his crime, he reminds his father that he merely exemplifies the statistical law that "so many people out of so many will be dishonest." When the virtuous Bitzer is indignantly asked whether he has a heart, he replies that he is physiologically assured of the fact; and to the further inquiry whether this heart of his is accessible to compassion, makes answer that "it is accessible to reason, and to nothing else." These returnings of Mr. Gradgrind's philosophy upon himself savour of the moral justice represented by Gratiano in the fourth act. So again, Coketown with its tall chimneys and black river, and its thirteen religious denominations, to which whoever else belonged the working men did *not*, is no perverse contradiction of fact. But the influence of Coketown, or of a whole wilderness of Coketowns, cannot justly be charged with a tendency to ripen such a product as Josiah Bounderby, who is not only the "bully of humanity," but proves to be a mean-spirited impostor in his pretensions to the glory of self-help. In short, *Hard Times* errs by its attempt to prove too much.

Apart, however, from the didactic purposes which overburden it, the pathos and humour of particular portions of this tale appear to me to have been in nowise overrated. The domestic tragedy of Stephen and Rachael has a subdued intensity of tenderness and melancholy of a kind rare with Dickens, upon whom the example of Mrs. Gaskell in this instance may not have been without

its influence. Nor is there anything more delicately and at the same time more appropriately conceived in any of his works, than poor Rachael's dominion over the imagination as well as over the affections of her noble-minded and unfortunate lover: "as the shining stars were to the heavy candle in the window, so was Rachael, in the rugged fancy of this man, to the common experiences of his life." The love-story of poor Louisa is of a different kind, and more wordy in the telling; yet here also the feelings painted are natural and true. The humorous interest is almost entirely concentrated upon the company of horse-riders; and never has Dickens' extraordinary power of humorous observation more genially asserted itself. From Mr. Sleary—"thtout man, game-eye"—and his protagonist, Mr. E. W. B. Childers, who, when he shook his long hair, caused it to "shake all at once," down to Master Kidderminster, who used to form the apex of the human pyramids, and "in whose young nature there was an original flavour of the misanthrope," these honest equestrians are more than worthy to stand by the side of Mr. Vincent Crummles and his company of actors; and the fun has here, in addition to the grotesqueness of the earlier picture, a mellowness of its own. Dickens' comic genius was never so much at its ease and so inexhaustible in ludicrous fancies, as in the depiction of such groups as this; and the horse-riders, skilfully introduced to illustrate a truth, wholesome if not novel, would have insured popularity so a far less interesting, and to a far less powerful fiction.

The year after that which saw the publication of *Hard Times* was one in which the thoughts of most Englishmen were turned away from the problems approached in that story. But if the military glories of 1854 had not aroused

in him any very exuberant enthusiasm, the reports from the Crimea in the ensuing winter were more likely to appeal to his patriotism as well as to his innate impatience of disorder and incompetence. In the first instance, however, he contented himself with those grumblings to which, as a sworn foe of red tape and a declared disbeliever in our Parliamentary system, he might claim to have a special right; and he seems to have been too restless in and about himself to have entered very closely into the progress of public affairs. The Christmas had been a merry one at Tavistock House; and the amateur theatricals of its juvenile company had passed through a most successful season. Their history has been written by one of the performers—himself not the least distinguished of the company, since it was he who, in Dickens' house, caused Thackeray to roll off his seat in a fit of laughter. Dickens, who with Mark Lemon disported himself among these precocious minnows, was, as our chronicler relates, like Triplet, "author, manager, and actor too," organiser, deviser, and harmoniser of all the incongruous assembled elements; it was he "who improvised costumes, painted and corked our innocent cheeks, and suggested all the most effective business of the scene." But as was usual with him, the transition was rapid from play to something very like earnest; and already in June, 1855, the Tavistock House theatre produced Mr. Wilkie Collins' melodrama of *The Lighthouse*, which afterwards found its way to the public stage. To Dickens, who performed in it with the author, it afforded "scope for a piece of acting of great power," the old sailor Aaron Gurnock, which by its savage picturesqueness earned a tribute of recognition from Carlyle. No less a hand than Stanfield painted the scenery, and Dickens himself, besides

writing the prologue, introduced into the piece a ballad called *The Story of the Wreck*, a not unsuccessful effort in Cowper's manner. At Christmas, 1856–57, there followed *The Frozen Deep*, another melodrama by the same author; and by this time the management of his private theatricals had become to Dickens a serious business to be carried on seriously for its own sake. "It was to him," he wrote, "like writing a book in company;" and his young people might learn from it "that kind of humility which is got from the earned knowledge that whatever the right hand finds to do must be done with the heart in it, and in a desperate earnest." *The Frozen Deep* was several times repeated, on one occasion for the benefit of the daughter of the recently deceased Douglas Jerrold; but by the end of January the little theatre was finally broken up; and though Dickens spent one more winter season at Tavistock House, the shadow was then already falling upon his cheerful home.

In the midst of his children's Christmas gaieties of the year 1855, Dickens had given two or three public readings to "wonderful audiences" in various parts of the country. A trip to Paris with Mr. Wilkie Collins had followed, during which, as he wrote home, he was wandering about Paris all day, dining at all manner of places, and frequenting the theatres at the rate of two or three a-night. "I suppose," he adds, with pleasant self-irony, "as an old farmer said of Scott, I am 'makin' mysel'' all the time; but I seem to be rather a free-and-easy sort of superior vagabond." And in truth a roving restless spirit was strong upon him in these years. Already, in April, he speaks of himself as "going off; I don't know where or how far, to ponder about I don't know what." France, Switzerland, Spain, Constantinople, in Mr. Layard's com-

pany had been successively in his thoughts, and for aught he knew, Greenland and the North Pole might occur to him next. At the same time he foresaw that the end of it all would be his shutting himself up in some out-of-the-way place of which he had not yet thought, and going desperately to work there.

Before, however, these phantasmagoric schemes had subsided into the quiet plan of an autumn visit to Folkestone, followed during the winter and spring by a residence at Paris, he had at least found a subject to ponder on, which was to suggest an altogether novel element in his next work of fiction. I have said that though like the majority of his fellow-countrymen, Dickens regarded our war with Russia as inevitable, yet his hatred of all war, and his impatience of the exaggerations of passion and sentiment which all war produces, had preserved him from himself falling a victim to their contagion. On the other hand, when in the winter of 1854–55 the note of exultation in the bravery of our soldiers in the Crimea began to be intermingled with complaints against the grievously defective arrangements for their comfort and health, and when these complaints, stimulated by the loud-voiced energy of the press, and extending into censures upon the whole antiquated and perverse system of our army administration, speedily swelled into a roar of popular indignation, sincere conviction ranged him on the side of the most uncompromising malcontents. He was at all times ready to give vent to that antipathy against officialism which is shared by so large a number of Englishmen. Though the son of a dockyard official, he is found roundly asserting that "more obstruction of good things and patronage of bad things has been committed in the dockyards—as in everything connected with the mis-

direction of the navy—than in every other branch of the public service put together, including"—the particularisation is hard—"even the Woods and Forests." He had listened, we may be sure, to the scornful denunciations launched by the prophet of the *Latter-Day Pamphlets* against Downing Street and all its works, and to the proclamation of the great though rather vague truth that "reform in that Downing Street department of affairs is precisely the reform which were worth all others." And now the heartrending sufferings of multitudes of brave men had brought to light, in one department of the public administration, a series of complications and perversities which in the end became so patent to the Government itself, that they had to be roughly remedied in the very midst of the struggle. The cry for administrative reform, which arose in the year 1855, however crude the form it frequently took, was in itself a logical enough result of the situation; and there is no doubt that the angriness of the complaint was intensified by the attitude taken up in the House of Commons by the head of the Government towards the pertinacious politician who made himself the mouthpiece of the extreme demands of the feeling outside. Mr. Layard was Dickens' valued friend; and the share is thus easily explained, which—against his otherwise uniform practice of abstaining from public meetings—the most popular writer of the day took in the Administrative Reform meetings, held in Drury Lane Theatre, on June 27th, 1855. The speech which he delivered on this occasion, and which was intended to aid in forcing the "whole question" of Administrative Reform upon the attention of an unwilling Government, possesses no value whatever in connexion with its theme, though of course it is not devoid of some smart and telling hits. Not on

the platform, but at his desk as an author, was Dickens to do real service to the cause of administrative efficiency. For while invective of a general kind runs off like water from the rock of usage, even Circumlocution Offices are not insensible to the acetous force of satire.

Dickens' caricature of British officialism formed the most generally attractive element in the story of *Little Dorrit*—originally intended to be called *Nobody's Fault*—which he published in monthly numbers, from December, 1855, to June, 1857. He was solemnly taken to task for his audacity by the *Edinburgh Review*, which reproached him for his persistent ridicule of "the institutions of the country, the laws, the administration, in a word, the government under which we live." His "charges" were treated as hardly seriously meant, but as worthy of severe reprobation because likely to be seriously taken by the poor, the uneducated, and the young. And the caricaturist, besides being reminded of the names of several eminent public servants, was specially requested to look, as upon a picture contrasting with his imaginary Circumlocution Office, upon the Post Office, or, for the choice offered was not more extensive, upon the London police so liberally praised by himself in his own journal. The delighted author of *Little Dorrit* replied to this not very skilful diatribe in a short and spirited rejoinder in *Household Words*. In this he judiciously confined himself to refuting an unfounded incidental accusation in the Edinburgh article, and to dwelling, as upon a "Curious Misprint," upon the indignant query: "How does he account for the career of *Mr. Rowland Hill?*" whose name, as an example of the ready intelligence of the Circumlocution Office, was certainly an odd *erratum*. Had he, however, cared to

make a more general reply to the main article of the indictment, he might have pointed out that, as a matter of fact, our official administrative machinery *had* recently broken down in one of its most important branches, and that circumlocution in the literal sense of the word—circumlocution between department and department, or office and office—had been one of the principal causes of the collapse. The general drift of the satire was therefore, in accordance with fact, and the satire itself salutary in its character. To quarrel with it for not taking into consideration what might be said on the other side, was to quarrel with the method of treatment which satire has at all times considered itself entitled to adopt; while to stigmatise a popular book as likely to mislead the ill-informed, was to suggest a restraint which would have deprived wit and humour of most of their opportunities of rendering service to either a good or an evil cause.

A far more legitimate exception has been taken to these Circumlocution Office episodes as defective in art by the very reason of their being exaggerations. Those best acquainted with the interiors of our government offices may be right in denying that the Barnacles can be regarded as an existing type. Indeed, it would at no time have been easy to point to any office quite as labyrinthine, or quite as bottomless, as that permanently presided over by Mr. Tite Barnacle; to any chief secretary or commissioner so absolutely wooden of fibre as he; or to any private secretary so completely absorbed in his eyeglass as Barnacle junior. But as satirical figures they one and all fulfil their purpose, as thoroughly as the picture of the official sanctum itself with its furniture "in the higher official manner," and its "general bam-

boozling air of how not to do it." The only question is, whether satire which, if it is to be effective, must be of a piece and in its way exaggerated, is not out of place in a pathetic and humorous fiction, where, like a patch of too diverse a thread, it interferes with the texture into which it is introduced. In themselves these passages of *Little Dorrit* deserve to remain unforgotten among the masterpieces of literary caricature; and there is, I do not hesitate to say, something of Swiftian force in their grotesque embodiment of a popular current of indignation. The mere name of the Circumlocution Office was a stroke of genius, one of those phrases of Dickens which Professor Masson justly describes as, whether exaggerated or not, "efficacious for social reform." As usual, Dickens had made himself well acquainted with the formal or outside part of his subject; the very air of Whitehall seems to gather round us as Mr. Tite Barnacle, in answer to a persistent inquirer who "wants to know" the position of a particular matter, concedes that it "may have been, in the course of official business, referred to the Circumlocution Office for its consideration," and that "the department may have either originated, or confirmed, a minute on the subject." In the *Household Words* paper, called *A Poor Man's Tale of a Patent* (1850), will be found a sufficiently elaborate study for Mr. Doyce's experiences of the government of his country, as wrathfully narrated by Mr. Meagles.

With the exception of the Circumlocution Office passages, —adventitious as they are to the progress of the action, *Little Dorrit* exhibits a palpable falling-off in inventive power. Forster illustrates by a striking facsimile the difference between the "labour and pains" of the author's short notes for *Little Dorrit* and the "lightness and confidence

of handling" in what hints he had jotted down for *David Copperfield*. Indeed, his "tablets" had about this time begun to be an essential part of his literary equipment. But in *Little Dorrit* there are enough internal signs of, possibly unconscious, lassitude. The earlier, no doubt, is, in every respect, the better part of the book; or, rather, the later part shows the author wearily at work upon a canvas too wide for him, and filling it up with a crowd of personages in whom it is difficult to take much interest. Even Mr. Merdle and his catastrophe produce the effect rather of a ghastly allegory than of an "extravagant conception," as the author ironically called it in his preface, derived only too directly from real life. In the earlier part of the book, in so far as it is not once again concerned with enforcing the moral of *Hard Times* in a different way, by means of Mrs Clennam and her son's early history, the humour of Dickens plays freely over the figure of the Father of the Marshalsea. It is a psychological masterpiece in its way; but the revolting selfishness of Little Dorrit's father is not redeemed artistically by her own longsuffering; for her pathos lacks the old irresistible ring. Doubtless much in this part of the story—the whole episode, for instance, of the honest turnkey—is in the author's best manner. But admirable as it is, this new picture of prison-life and prison-sentiment has an undercurrent of bitterness, indeed, almost of contemptuousness, foreign to the best part of Dickens' genius. This is still more perceptible in a figure not less true to life than the Father of the Marshalsea himself—Flora, the overblown flower of Arthur Clennam's boyish love. The humour of the conception is undeniable, but the whole effect is cruel; and, though greatly amused, the reader feels almost as if he were abetting a profanation. Dickens

could not have become what he is to the great multitude of his readers had he, as a humorist, often indulged in this cynical mood.

There is in general little in the characters of this fiction to compensate for the sense of oppression from which, as he follows the slow course of its far from striking plot, the reader finds it difficult to free himself. A vein of genuine humour shows itself in Mr. Plornish, obviously a favourite of the author's, and one of those genuine working men, as rare in fiction as on the stage, where Mr. Toole has reproduced the species; but the relation between Mr. and Mrs. Plornish is only a fainter revival of that between Mr. and Mrs. Bagnet. Nor is there anything fresh or novel in the characters belonging to another social sphere. Henry Gowan, apparently intended as an elaborate study in psychology, is only a very tedious one; and his mother at Hampton Court, whatever phase of a dilapidated aristocracy she may be intended to caricature, is merely illbred. As for Mrs. General, she is so sorry a burlesque that she could not be reproduced without extreme caution even on the stage—to the reckless conventionalities of which, indeed, the whole picture of the Dorrit family as *nouveaux riches* bears a striking resemblance. There is, on the contrary, some good caricature, which, in one instance at least, was thought transparent by the knowing, in the *silhouettes* of the great Mr. Merdle's professional guests; but these are, like the Circumlocution Office puppets, satiric sketches, not the living figures of creative humour.

I have spoken of this story with a censure which may be regarded as exaggerated in its turn. But I well remember, at the time of its publication in numbers, the general consciousness that *Little Dorrit* was proving unequal to the

high-strung expectations which a new work by Dickens then excited in his admirers both young and old. There were new and striking features in it, with abundant comic and serious effect, but there was no power in the whole story to seize and hold, and the feeling could not be escaped that the author was not at his best. And Dickens was not at his best when he wrote *Little Dorrit*. Yet while nothing is more remarkable in the literary career of Dickens than this apparently speedy decline of his power, nothing is more wonderful in it than the degree to which he righted himself again, not, indeed, with his public, for the public never deserted its favourite, but with his genius.

A considerable part of *Little Dorrit* must have been written in Paris; where, in October, after a quiet autumn at Folkestone, Dickens had taken a family apartment in the Avenue des Champs Élysées, "about half a quarter of a mile above Franconi's." Here, after his fashion, he lived much to himself, his family and his guests, only occasionally finding his way into a literary or artistic *salon*; but he sat for his portrait to both Ary and Henri Scheffer, and was easily persuaded to read his *Cricket on the Hearth* to an audience in the atelier. Macready and Mr. Wilkie Collins were in turn the companions of many "theatrical and lounging" evenings. Intent as Dickens now had become upon the technicalities of his own form of composition, this interest must have been greatly stimulated by the frequent comparison of modern French plays, in most of which nicety of construction and effectiveness of situation have so paramount a significance. At Boulogne, too, Mr. Wilkie Collins was a welcome summer visitor. And in the autumn the two friends started on the *Lazy Tour of Two Idle Apprentices*. It came to an untimely end as a pedestrian excursion, but the record of

it is one of the pleasantest memorials of a friendship which brightened much of Dickens' life and intensified his activity in work as well as in pleasure.

"Mr. Thomas Idle" had indeed a busy time of it in this year 1857. The publication of *Little Dorrit* was not finished till June, and in August we find him, between a reading and a performance of *The Frozen Deep* at Manchester—then in the exciting days of the great Art Exhibition—thus describing to Macready his way of filling up his time: "I hope you have seen my tussle with the *Edinburgh*. I saw the chance last Friday week, as I was going down to read the *Carol* in St. Martin's Hall. Instantly turned to, then and there, and wrote half the article, flew out of bed early next morning, and finished it by noon. Went down to Gallery of Illustration (we acted that night), did the day's business, corrected the proofs in Polar costume in dressing-room, broke up two numbers of *Household Words* to get it out directly, played in *Frozen Deep* and *Uncle John*, presided at supper of company, made no end of speeches, went home and gave in completely for four hours, then got sound asleep, and next day was as fresh as you used to be in the far-off days of your lusty youth." It was on the occasion of the readings at St. Martin's Hall, for the benefit of Douglas Jerrold's family, that the thought of giving readings for his own benefit first suggested itself to Dickens; and, as will be seen, by April, 1858, the idea had been carried into execution, and a new phase of life had begun for him. And yet at this very time, when his home was about to cease being in the fullest sense a home to Dickens, by a strange irony of fortune, he had been enabled to carry out a long-cherished fancy and to take possession, in the first instance as a summer residence, of the house on Gad's Hill, of which a lucky chance had

made him the owner rather more than a twelvemonth before.

"My little place," he wrote in 1858, to his Swiss friend Cerjat, "is a grave red-brick house (time of George the First, I suppose), which I have added to and stuck bits upon in all manner of ways, so that it is as pleasantly irregular, and as violently opposed to all architectural ideas, as the most hopeful man could possibly desire. It is on the summit of Gad's Hill. The robbery was committed before the door, on the man with the treasure, and Falstaff ran away from the identical spot of ground now covered by the room in which I write. A little rustic alehouse, called 'The Sir John Falstaff,' is over the way—has been over the way ever since, in honour of the event. . . . The whole stupendous property is on the old Dover road. . . ."

Among "the blessed woods and fields" which, as he says, had done him "a world of good," in a season of unceasing bodily and mental unrest, the great English writer had indeed found a habitation fitted to become inseparable from his name and fame. It was not till rather later, in 1860, that, after the sale of Tavistock House, Gad's Hill Place became his regular abode, a London house being only now and then taken for the season, while furnished rooms were kept at the office in Wellington Street for occasional use. And it was only gradually that he enlarged and improved his Kentish place so as to make it the pretty and comfortable country-house which at the present day it appears to be; constructing, in course of time, the passage under the highroad to the shrubbery, where the Swiss châlet given to him by Mr. Fechter was set up, and building the pretty little conservatory, which, when completed, he was not to live many days to enjoy. But an old-fashioned

homely look, free from the slightest affectation of quietness, belonged to Gad's Hill Place, even after all these alterations, and belongs to it even at this day, when Dickens' solid old-fashioned furniture has been changed. In the pretty little front hall still hangs the illuminated tablet recalling the legend of Gad's Hill; and on the inside panels of the library door remain the facetious sham book-titles: "Hudson's *Complete Failure*," and "*Ten Minutes in China*," and "Cats' *Lives*," and, on a long series of leather backs, "Hansard's *Guide to Refreshing Sleep*." The rooms are all of a modest size, and the bedrooms—among them Dickens' own—very low; but the whole house looks thoroughly habitable, while the views across the cornfields at the back are such as in their undulation of soft outline are nowhere more pleasant than in Kent. Rochester and the Medway are near, even for those who do not—like Dickens and his dogs—count a stretch past three or four "milestones on the Dover road" as the mere beginning of an afternoon's walk. At a distance little greater there are in one direction the green glades of Cobham Park, with Chalk and Gravesend beyond; and in another the flat country towards the Thames, with its abundance of market-gardens. There, too, are the marshes on the border of which lie the massive ruin of Cooling Castle, the refuge of the Lollard martyr who was *not* concerned in the affair on Gad's Hill, and Cooling Church and churchyard, with the quaint little gravestones in the grass. London and the office were within easy reach, and Paris itself was, for practical purposes, not much farther away, so that, in later days at all events, Dickens found himself "crossing the Channel perpetually."

The name of Dickens still has a good sound in and about Gad's Hill. He was on very friendly terms with

some families whose houses stand near to his own; and though nothing was farther from his nature, as he says, than to "wear topboots" and play the squire, yet he had in him not a little of what endears so many a resident country gentleman to his neighbourhood. He was head organiser rather than chief patron of village sports, of cricket matches and foot races; and his house was a dispensary for the poor of the parish. He established confidential relations between his house and the Falstaff Inn over the way, regulating his servants' consumption of beer on a strict but liberal plan of his own devising; but it is not for this reason only that the successor of Mr. Edwin Trood—for such was the veritable name of mine host of the Falstaff in Dickens' time—declares that it was a bad day for the neighbourhood when Dickens was taken away from it. In return, nothing could exceed the enthusiasm which surrounded him in his own country, and Forster has described his astonishment at the manifestation of it on the occasion of the wedding of the youngest daughter of the house in 1860. And, indeed, he was born to be popular, and specially among those by whom he was beloved as a friend or honoured as a benefactor.

But it was not for long intervals of either work or rest that Dickens was to settle down in his pleasant country house, nor was he ever, except quite at the last, to sit down under his own roof in peace and quiet, a wanderer no more. Less than a year after he had taken up his residence for the summer on Gad's Hill, his home, and that of his younger children, was his wife's home no longer. The separation, which appears to have been preparing itself for some, but no very long, time, took place in May, 1858, when, after an amicable arrange-

ment, Mrs. Dickens left her husband, who henceforth allowed her an ample separate maintenance, and occasionally corresponded with her, but never saw her again. The younger children remained in their father's house under the self-sacrificing and devoted care of Mrs. Dickens' surviving sister, Miss Hogarth. Shortly afterwards, Dickens thought it well, in printed words which may be left forgotten, to rebut some slanderous gossip which, as the way of the world is, had misrepresented the circumstances of this separation. The causes of the event were an open secret to his friends and acquaintances. If he had ever loved his wife with that affection before which so-called incompatibilities of habits, temper, or disposition fade into nothingness, there is no indication of it in any of his numerous letters addressed to her. Neither has it ever been pretended that he strove in the direction of that resignation which love and duty together made possible to David Copperfield, or even that he remained in every way master of himself, as many men have known how to remain, the story of whose wedded life and its disappointments has never been written in history or figured in fiction. It was not incumbent upon his faithful friend and biographer, and much less can it be upon one whom nothing but a sincere admiration of Dickens' genius entitles to speak of him at all, to declare the standard by which the most painful transaction in his life is to be judged. I say the most painful, for it is with a feeling akin to satisfaction that one reads, in a letter three years afterwards to a lady in reference to her daughter's wedding: "I want to thank you also for thinking of me on the occasion, but I feel that I am better away from it. I should really have a misgiving that I was a sort of a shadow on a young marriage, and you will understand

me when I say so, and no more." A shadow too—who would deny it?—falls on every one of the pictures in which the tenderest of modern humorists has painted the simple joys and the sacred sorrows of that home life of which to his generation he had become almost the poet and the prophet, when we remember how he was himself neither blessed with its full happiness nor capable of accepting with resignation the imperfection inherent in it, as in all things human.

CHAPTER VI.

LAST YEARS.

1858—1870.

The last twelve years of Dickens' life were busy years like the others; but his activity was no longer merely the expression of exuberant force, and long before the collapse came he had been repeatedly warned of the risks he continued to defy. When, however, he first entered upon those public readings, by persisting in which he indisputably hastened his end, neither he nor his friends took into account the fear of bodily ill-effects resulting from his exertions. Their misgivings had other grounds. Of course, had there been any pressure of pecuniary difficulty or need upon Dickens when he began, or when, on successive occasions he resumed, his public readings, there would be nothing further to be said. But I see no suggestion of any such pressure. "My worldly circumstances," he wrote before he had finally made up his mind to read in America, "are very good. I don't want money. All my possessions are free and in the best order. Still," he added, "at fifty-five or fifty-six, the likelihood of making a very great addition to one's capital in half a year is an immense consideration." Moreover, with all his love of doing as he chose, and his sense of the value of such freedom to him as a writer, he was a man of simple though liberal habits of life, with no taste for the gorgeous or

capricious extravagances of a Balzac or a Dumas, nor can he have been at a loss how to make due provision for those whom in the course of nature he would leave behind him. Love of money for its own sake, or for that of the futilities it can purchase, was altogether foreign to his nature. At the same time, the rapid making of large sums has potent attractions for most men; and these attractions are perhaps strongest for those who engage in the pursuit for the sake of the race as well as of the prize. Dickens' readings were virtually something new; their success was not only all his own, but unique and unprecedented, what nobody but himself ever had achieved or ever could have achieved. Yet the determining motive—if I read his nature rightly—was after all of another kind. "Two souls dwelt in his breast;" and when their aspirations united in one appeal it was irresistible. The author who craved for the visible signs of a sympathy responding to that which he felt for his multitudes of readers, and the actor who longed to impersonate creations already beings of flesh and blood to himself, were both astir in him, and in both capacities he felt himself drawn into the very publicity deprecated by his friends. He liked, as one who knew him thoroughly said to me, to be face to face with his public; and against this liking, which he had already indulged as fully as he could without passing the boundaries between private and professional life, arguments were in vain. It has been declared sheer pedantry to speak of such boundaries; and to suggest that there is anything degrading in paid readings such as those of Dickens would, on the face of it, be absurd. On the other hand, the author who, on or off the stage, becomes the interpreter of his writings to large audiences, more especially if he does his best to stereotype his interpretation

by constantly repeating it, limits his own prerogative of being many things to many men; and where the author of a work, more particularly of a work of fiction, adjusts it to circumstances differing from those of its production, he allows the requirements of the lesser art to prejudice the claims of the greater.

Dickens cannot have been blind to these considerations; but to others his eyes were never opened. He found much that was inspiriting in his success as a reader, and this not only in the large sums he gained, or even in the "roaring sea of response," to use his own fine metaphor, of which he had become accustomed to "stand upon the beach." His truest sentiment as an author was touched to the quick; and he was, as he says himself, "brought very near to what he had sometimes dreamed might be his fame," when at York, a lady, whose face he had never seen, stopped him in the street, and said to him: "Mr. Dickens, will you let me touch the hand that has filled my house with many friends?" or when at Belfast, he was almost overwhelmed with entreaties "to shake hands, Misther Dickens, and God bless you, sir; not ounly for the light you've been to me this night, but for the light you've been in mee house, sir—and God love your face!—this many a year." On the other hand—and this, perhaps, a nature like his would not be the quickest to perceive—there was something vulgarising in the constant striving after immediate success, in the shape of large audiences, loud applause, and satisfactory receipts. The conditions of the actor's art cannot forego these stimulants; and this is precisely his disadvantage in comparison with artists who are able to possess themselves in quiet. To me, at least, it is painful to find Dickens jubilantly recording how at

Dublin "eleven bank-notes were thrust into the pay-box —Arthur saw them—at one time for eleven stalls;" how at Edinburgh, "neither Grisi, nor Jenny Lind, nor anything, nor anybody, seems to make the least effect on the draw of the readings;" while, every allowance being made, there is something almost ludicrous in the double assertion, that "the most delicate audience I had ever seen in any provincial place is Canterbury; but the audience with the greatest sense of humour, certainly is Dover." What subjects for parody Dickens would have found in these innocent ecstasies if uttered by any other man! Undoubtedly, this enthusiasm was closely connected with the very thoroughness with which he entered into the work of his readings. "You have no idea," he tells Forster, in 1867, "how I have worked at them. Finding it necessary, as their reputation widened, that they should be better than at first, *I have learnt them all*, so as to have no mechanical drawback in looking after the words. I have tested all the serious passion in them by everything I know; made the humorous points much more humorous; corrected my utterance of certain words; cultivated a self-possession not to be disturbed; and made myself master of the situation." "From ten years ago to last night," he writes to his son from Baltimore in 1868, "I have never read to an audience but I have watched for an opportunity of striking out something better somewhere." The freshness with which he returned night after night and season after season, to the sphere of his previous successes, was itself a genuine actor's gift; "so real," he declares, "are my fictions to myself, that, after hundreds of nights, I come with a feeling of perfect freshness to that little red table, and laugh and cry with my hearers as if I had never stood there before."

Dickens' first public readings were given at Birmingham, during the Christmas week of 1853–54, in support of the new Midland Institute; but a record—for the authenticity of which I cannot vouch—remains, that with true theatrical instinct he, before the Christmas in question, gave a trial reading of the *Christmas Carol* to a smaller public audience at Peterborough. He had since been repeatedly found willing to read for benevolent purposes; and the very fact that it had become necessary to decline some of these frequent invitations, had again suggested the possibility—which had occurred to him eleven years before—of meeting the demand in a different way. Yet it may, after all, be doubted whether the idea of undertaking an entire series of paid public readings would have been carried out, had it not been for the general restlessness which had seized upon Dickens early in 1858, when, moreover, he had no special task either of labour or of leisure to absorb him, and when he craved for excitement more than ever. To go home —in this springtime of 1858—was not to find there the peace of contentment. "I must do *something*," he wrote in March to his faithful counsellor, "or I shall wear my heart away. I can see no better thing to do that is half so hopeful in itself, or half so well suited to my restless state."

So by April the die was cast, and on the 29th of that month he had entered into his new relation with the public. One of the strongest and most genuine impulses of his nature had victoriously asserted itself, and according to his wont he addressed himself to his task with a relentless vigour which flinched from no exertion. He began with a brief series at St. Martin's Hall, and then, his invaluable friend Arthur Smith continuing to act as his manager,

he contrived to cram not less than eighty-seven readings into three months and a half of travelling in the "provinces," including Scotland and Ireland. A few winter readings in London, and a short supplementary course in the country during October, 1859, completed this first series. Already, in 1858, we find him, in a letter from Ireland, complaining of the "tremendous strain," and declaring, "I seem to be always either in a railway carriage, or reading, or going to bed. I get so knocked up, whenever I have a minute to remember it, that then I go to bed as a matter of course." But the enthusiasm which everywhere welcomed him—I can testify to the thrill of excitement produced by his visit to Cambridge, in October, 1859—repaid him for his fatigues. Scotland thawed to him, and with Dublin—where his success was extraordinary—he was so smitten, as to think it at first sight "pretty nigh as big as Paris." In return, the Boots at Morrison's expressed the general feeling in a patriotic point of view: "Whaat sart of a hoose, sur?" he asked me. "Capital." "The Lard be praised, for the 'onor o' Dooblin!"

The books, or portions of books, to which he confined himself during this first series of readings, were few in number. They comprised the *Carol* and the *Chimes*, and two stories from earlier Christmas numbers of *Household Words*—may the exclamation of the soft-hearted chambermaid at the Holly Tree Inn, "It's a shame to part 'em!" never vanish from my memory!—together with the episodic readings of the *Trial* in *Pickwick*, *Mrs. Gamp*, and *Paul Dombey*. Of these the *Pickwick*, which I heard more than once, is still vividly present to me. The only drawback to the complete enjoyment of it was the lurking fear that there had been some tampering with the text, not to be condoned even in its author. But in the way of

assumption, Charles Mathews the elder himself could have accomplished no more Protean effort. The lack-lustre eye of Mr. Justice Stareleigh, the forensic hitch of Mr. Serjeant Buzfuz, and the hopeless impotence of Mr. Nathaniel Winkle, were alike incomparable. And if the success of the impersonation of Mr. Samuel Weller was less complete—although Dickens had formerly acted the character on an amateur stage—the reason probably was that, by reason of his endless store of ancient and modern instances, Sam had himself become a quasi-mythical being, whom it was almost painful to find reproduced in flesh and blood.

I have not hesitated to treat these readings by Dickens as if they had been the performances of an actor; and the description would apply even more strongly to his later readings, in which he seemed to make his points in a more accentuated fashion than before. "His readings," says Mr. C. Kent, in an interesting little book about them, "were, in the fullest meaning of the words, singularly ingenious and highly-elaborated histrionic performances." As such, they had been prepared with a care such as few actors bestow upon their parts, and—for the book was prepared not less than the reading—not all authors bestow upon their plays. Now the art of reading, even in the case of dramatic works, has its own laws, which even the most brilliant readers cannot neglect except at their peril. A proper pitch has to be found in the first instance, before the exceptional passages can be, as it were, marked off from it; and the absence of this groundtone sometimes interfered with the total effect of a reading by Dickens. On the other hand, the exceptional passages were, if not uniformly, at least generally excellent; nor am I at all disposed to agree with Forster in preferring, as a rule, the humorous

to the pathetic. At the same time, there was noticeable in these readings a certain hardness which competent critics likewise discerned in Dickens' acting, and which could not, at least in the former case, be regarded as an ordinary characteristic of dilettanteism. The truth is that he isolated his parts too sharply—a frequent fault of English acting, and one more detrimental to the total effect of a reading than even to that of an acted play.

No sooner had the heaviest stress of the first series of readings ceased, than Dickens was once more at work upon a new fiction. The more immediate purpose was to ensure a prosperous launch to the journal which, in the spring of 1859, took the place of *Household Words*. A dispute, painful in its origin, but ending in an amicable issue, had resulted in the purchase of that journal by Dickens; but already a little earlier, he had—as he was entitled to do—begun the new venture of *All the Year Round*, with which *Household Words* was afterwards incorporated. The first number, published on April 30th, contained the earliest instalment of *A Tale of Two Cities*, which was completed by November 20th following.

This story holds a unique place among the fictions of its author. Perhaps the most striking difference between it and his other novels may seem to lie in the all but entire absence from it of any humour or attempt at humour; for neither the brutalities of that "honest tradesman," Jerry, nor the laconisms of Miss Pross, can well be called by that name. Not that his sources of humour were drying up, even though, about this time, he contributed to an American journal a short "romance of the real world," *Hunted Down*, from which the same relief is again conspicuously absent. For the humour of Dickens was to assert itself with unmistakeable force

in his next longer fiction, and was even before that, in some of his occasional papers, to give delightful proofs of its continued vigour. In the case of the *Tale of Two Cities*, he had a new and distinct design in his mind which did not indeed exclude humour, but with which a liberal indulgence in it must have seriously interfered. "I set myself," he writes, "the little task of writing a picturesque story, rising in every chapter with characters true to nature, but whom the story itself should express more than they should express themselves by dialogue. I mean, in other words, that I fancied a story of incident might be written, in place of the bestiality that is written under that pretence, pounding the characters out in its own mortar, and beating their own interests out of them." He therefore renounced his more usual method in favour of one probably less congenial to him. Yet, in his own opinion at least, he succeeded so well in the undertaking, that when the story was near its end, he could venture to express a hope that it was "the best story he had written." So much praise will hardly be given to this novel even by admirers of the French art of telling a story succinctly, or by those who can never resist a rather hysterical treatment of the French Revolution.

In my own opinion, *A Tale of Two Cities* is a skilfully though not perfectly constructed novel, which needed but little substantial alteration in order to be converted into a not less effective stage-play. And with such a design, Dickens actually sent the proof-sheets of the book to his friend Regnier, in the fearful hope that he might approve of the project of its dramatisation for a French theatre. Cleverly or clumsily adapted, the tale of the Revolution and its sanguinary vengeance was unlikely to commend itself to the Imperial censorship; but an English version

was, I believe, afterwards very fairly successful on the boards of the Adelphi, where Madame Celeste was certainly in her right place as Madame Defarge, an excellent character for a melodrama, though rather wearisome as she lies in wait through half a novel.

The construction of this story is, as I have said, skilful but not perfect. Dickens himself successfully defended his use of accident in bringing about the death of Madame Defarge; the real objection to the conduct of this episode, however, lies in the inadequacy of the contrivance for leaving Miss Pross behind in Paris. Too much is also, I think, made to turn upon the three words "and their descendants"—non-essential in the original connexion—by which Dr. Manette's written denunciation becomes fatal to those he loves. Still, the general edifice of the plot is solid; its interest is, notwithstanding the crowded background, concentrated with much skill upon a small group of personages; and Carton's self-sacrifice, admirably prepared from the very first, produces a legitimate tragic effect. At the same time, the novelist's art vindicates its own claims. Not only does this story contain several narrative episodes of remarkable power—such as the flight from Paris at the close, and the touching little incident of the seamstress, told in Dickens' sweetest pathetic manner—but it is likewise enriched by some descriptive pictures of unusual excellence: for instance, the sketch of Dover in the good old smuggling times, and the mezzotint of the stormy evening in Soho. Doubtless the increased mannerism of the style is disturbing, and this not only in the high-strung French scenes. As to the historical element in this novel, Dickens modestly avowed his wish that he might by his story have been able "to add something to the popular and

picturesque means of understanding that terrible time, though no one can hope to add anything to Mr. Carlyle's wonderful book." But if Dickens desired to depict the noble of the *ancien régime*, either according to Carlyle or according to intrinsic probability, he should not have offered, in his Marquis, a type historically questionable, and unnatural besides. The description of the Saint Antoine, before and during the bursting of the storm, has in it more of truthfulness, or of the semblance of truthfulness; and Dickens' perception of the physiognomy of the French workman is, I think, remarkably accurate. Altogether, the book is an extraordinary *tour de force*, which Dickens never repeated.

The opening of a new story by Dickens gave the necessary *impetus* to his new journal at its earliest stage; nor was the ground thus gained ever lost. Mr. W. H. Wills stood by his chief's side as of old, taking, more especially in later years, no small share of responsibility upon him. The prospectus of *All the Year Round* had not in vain promised an identity of principle in its conduct with that of its predecessor; in energy and spirit it showed no falling off; and, though not in all respects, the personality of Dickens made itself felt as distinctly as ever. Besides the *Tale of Two Cities*, he contributed to it his story of *Great Expectations*. Among his contributors, Mr. Wilkie Collins took away the breath of multitudes of readers; Mr. Charles Reade disported himself among the facts which gave stamina to his fiction; and Lord Lytton made a daring voyage into a mysterious country. Thither Dickens followed him, for once, in his *Four Stories*, not otherwise noteworthy, and written in a manner already difficult to discriminate from that of Mr. Wilkie Collins. For the rest, the advice with which Dickens aided Lord

Lytton's progress in his *Strange Story* was neither more ready nor more painstaking than that which he bestowed upon his younger contributors, to more than one of whom he generously gave the opportunity of publishing in his journal a long work of fiction. Some of these younger writers were at this period among his most frequent guests and associates; for nothing more naturally commended itself to him than the encouragement of the younger generation.

But though longer imaginative works played at least as conspicuous a part in the new journal as they had in the old, the conductor likewise continued to make manifest his intention that the lesser contributions should not be treated by readers or by writers as harmless necessary "padding." For this purpose it was requisite not only that the choice of subjects should be made with the utmost care, but also that the master's hand should itself be occasionally visible. Dickens' occasional contributions had been few and unimportant, till in a happy hour he began a series of papers, including many of the pleasantest, as well as of the mellowest, among the lighter productions of his pen. As usual, he had taken care to find for this series a name which of itself went far to make its fortune.

I am both a town and a country traveller, and am always on the road. Figuratively speaking, I travel for the great house of Human Interest Brothers, and have rather a large connexion in the fancy goods way. Literally speaking, I am always wandering here and there from my rooms in Covent Garden, London—now about the city streets, now about the country byroads, seeing many little things and some great things, which, because they interest me, I think may interest others.

The whole collection of these *Uncommercial Traveller*

papers, together with the *Uncommercial Samples* which succeeded them after Dickens' return from America, and which begin with a graphic account of his homeward voyage *Aboard Ship*, where the voice of conscience spoke in the motion of the screw, amounts to thirty-seven articles, and spreads over a period of nine years. They are necessarily of varying merit, but among them are some which deserve a permanent place in our lighter literature. Such are the description of the churchyards on a quiet evening in *The City of the Absent*, the grotesque picture of loneliness in *Chambers*—a favourite theme with Dickens—and the admirable papers on *Shy Neighbourhoods* and on *Tramps*. Others have a biographical interest, though delightfully objective in treatment; yet others are mere fugitive pieces; but there are few without some of the most attractive qualities of Dickens' easiest style.

Dickens contributed other occasional papers to his journal, some of which may be forgotten without injury to his fame. Among these may be reckoned the rather dreary *George Silverman's Explanation* (1868), in which there is nothing characteristic but a vivid picture of a set of ranters, led by a clique of scoundrels; on the other hand, there will always be admirers of the pretty *Holiday Romance*, published nearly simultaneously in America and England, a nosegay of tales told by children, the only fault of which is that, as with other children's nosegays, there is perhaps a little too much of it. I have no room for helping to rescue from partial oblivion an old friend, whose portrait has not, I think, found a home among his master's collected sketches. Pincher's counterfeit has gone astray like *Pincher* himself. Meanwhile, the special institution of the Christmas Number flourished in connexion with *All the Year*

Round down to the year 1867, as it had during the last five years of *Household Words*. It consisted, with the exception of the very last number, of a series of short stories, in a framework of the editor's own devising. To the authors of the stories, of which he invariably himself wrote one or more, he left the utmost liberty, at times stipulating for nothing but that tone of cheerful philanthropy which he had domesticated in his journal. In the Christmas Numbers, which gradually attained to such a popularity that of one of the last something like a quarter of a million copies were sold, Dickens himself shone most conspicuously in the introductory sections; and some of these are to be reckoned among his very best descriptive character-sketches. Already in *Household Words* Christmas Numbers the introductory sketch of the *Seven Poor Travellers* from Watts's charity at supper in the Rochester hostelry, and the excellent description of a winter journey and sojourn at the *Holly Tree Inn*, with an excursus on inns in general, had become widely popular; the *All the Year Round* Numbers, however, largely augmented this success. After *Tom Tiddler's Ground*, with the adventures of Miss Kitty Kimmeens, a pretty little morality in miniature, teaching the same lesson as the vagaries of Mr. Mopes the hermit, came *Somebody's Luggage*, with its exhaustive disquisition on waiters; and then the memorable chirpings of *Mrs. Lirriper*, in both *Lodgings* and *Legacy*, admirable in the delicacy of their pathos, and including an inimitable picture of London lodging-house life. Then followed the *Prescriptions* of *Dr. Marigold*, the eloquent and sarcastic but tender-hearted Cheap Jack; and *Mugby Junction*, which gave words to the cry of a whole nation of hungry and thirsty travellers. In the tales and sketches con-

tributed by him to the Christmas Numbers, in addition to these introductions, he at times gave the rein to his love for the fanciful and the grotesque, which there was here no reason to keep under. On the whole, written as in a sense these compositions were to order, nothing is more astonishing in them than his continued freshness, against which his mannerism is here of vanishing importance; and, inasmuch as after issuing a last Christmas Number of a different kind, Dickens abandoned the custom when it had reached the height of popular favour, and when manifold imitations had offered him the homage of their flattery, he may be said to have withdrawn from this campaign in his literary life with banners flying.

In the year 1859 Dickens' readings had been comparatively few; and they had ceased altogether in the following year, when the *Uncommercial Traveller* began his wanderings. The winter from 1859 to 1860 was his last winter at Tavistock House; and, with the exception of his rooms in Wellington Street, he had now no settled residence but Gad's Hill Place. He sought its pleasant retreat about the beginning of June, after the new experience of an attack of rheumatism had made him recognise "the necessity of country training all through the summer." Yet such was the recuperative power, or the indomitable self-confidence, of his nature, that after he had in these summer months contributed some of the most delightful *Uncommercial Traveller* papers to his journal, we find him already in August "prowling about, meditating a new book."

It is refreshing to think of Dickens in this pleasant interval of country life, before he had rushed once more into the excitement of his labours as a public reader. We may picture him to ourselves, accompanied by his dogs, striding along the country roads and lanes, exploring the

haunts of the country tramps, "a piece of Kentish road," for instance, "bordered on either side by a wood, and having on one hand, between the road dust and the trees, a skirting patch of grass. Wild flowers grow in abundance on this spot, and it lies high and airy, with a distant river stealing steadily away to the ocean like a man's life. To gain the milestone here, which the moss, primroses, violets, bluebells, and wild roses would soon render illegible but for peering travellers pushing them aside with their sticks, you must come up a steep hill come which way you may." At the foot of that hill, I fancy, lay Dullborough town half asleep in the summer afternoon; and the river in the distance was that which bounded the horizon of a little boy's vision "whose father's family name was Pirrip, and whose christian-name was Philip, but whose infant tongue could make of both names nothing longer or more explicit than Pip."

The story of Pip's adventures, the novel of *Great Expectations*, was thought over in these Kentish perambulations between Thames and Medway along the road which runs, apparently with the intention of running out to sea, from Higham towards the marshes; in the lonely churchyard of Cooling village by the thirteen little stone-lozenges, of which Pip counted only five, now nearly buried in their turn by the rank grass; and in quiet saunters through the familiar streets of Rochester, past the "queer" town hall; and through the "Vines" past the fine old Restoration House, called in the book (by the name of an altogether different edifice) Satis House. And the climax of the narrative was elaborated on a unique steamboat excursion from London to the mouth of the Thames, broken by a night at the Ship and Lobster, an old riverside inn called The Ship in the story. No

wonder that Dickens' descriptive genius should become refreshed by these studies of his subject, and that thus *Great Expectations* should have indisputably become one of the most picturesque of his books. But it is something very much more at the same time. The *Tale of Two Cities* had as a story strongly seized upon the attention of the reader. But in the earlier chapters of *Great Expectations* everyone felt that Dickens was himself again. Since the Yarmouth scenes in *David Copperfield* he had written nothing in which description married itself to sentiment so humorously and so tenderly. Uncouth, and slow, and straightforward, and gentle of heart, like Mr. Peggotty, Joe Gargery is as new a conception as he is a genuinely true one; nor is it easy to know under what aspect to relish him most, whether disconsolate in his Sunday clothes, "like some extraordinary bird, standing, as he did, speechless, with his tuft of feathers ruffled, and his mouth open as if he wanted a worm," or at home by his own fireside, winking at his little comrade, and, when caught in the act by his wife, "drawing the back of his hand across his nose with his usual conciliatory air on such occasions." Nor since *David Copperfield* had Dickens again shown such an insight as he showed here into the world of a child's mind. "To be quite sure," he wrote to Forster, "I had fallen into no unconscious repetitions, I read *David Copperfield* again the other day, and was affected by it to a degree you would hardly believe." His fears were unnecessary; for with all its charm the history of Pip lacks the personal element which insures our sympathy to the earlier story and to its hero. In delicacy, of feeling, however, as well as in humour of description, nothing in Dickens surpasses the earlier chap-

ters of *Great Expectations*; and equally excellent is the narrative of Pip's disloyalty of heart towards his early friends, down to his departure from the forge, a picture of pitiable selfishness almost Rousseau-like in its fidelity to poor human nature, down to his comic humiliation, when in the pride of his new position and his new clothes, before "that unlimited miscreant, Trabb's boy." The later and especially the concluding portions of this novel contain much that is equal in power to its opening; but it must be allowed that, before many chapters have ended, a false tone finds its way into the story. The whole history of Miss Havisham, and the crew of relations round the unfortunate creature, is strained and unnatural, and Estella's hardness is as repulsive as that of Edith Dombey herself. Mr. Jaggers and his housekeeper, and even Mr. Wemmick, have an element of artificiality, in them, while about the Pocket family there is little, if anything at all, that is real. The story, however, seems to recover itself as the main thread in its deftly-woven texture is brought forward again. when on a dark gusty night, ominous of coming trouble, the catastrophe of Pip's expectations announces itself in the return from abroad of his unknown benefactor, the convict whom he had as a child fed on the marshes. The remainder of the narrative is successful in conveying to the reader the sense of sickening anxiety which fills the hero; the interest is skilfully sustained by the introduction of a very strong situation—Pip's narrow escape out of the clutches of "Old Orlick" in the limekiln on the marshes; and the climax is reached in the admirably-executed narrative of the convict's attempt, with the aid of Pip, to escape by the river. The actual winding-up of *Great Expectations* is not altogether satisfactory; but on the whole the book

must be ranked among the very best of Dickens' later novels, as combining, with the closer construction and intenser narrative force common to several of these, not a little of the delightfully genial humour of his earlier works.

Already before *Great Expectations* was completely published, Dickens had given a few readings at the St. James's Hall, and by the end of October in the same year, 1861, he was once more engaged in a full course of country readings. They occupied him till the following January, only ten days being left for his Christmas Number, and a brief holiday for Christmas itself; so close was the adjustment of time and work by this favourite of fortune. The death of his faithful Arthur Smith befell most untowardly before the country readings were begun, but their success was unbroken, from Scotland to South Devon. The long-contemplated extract from *Copperfield* had at last been added to the list—a self-sacrifice *coram publico*, hallowed by success—and another from *Nicholas Nickleby*, which "went in the wildest manner." He was, however, nearly worn-out with fatigue before these winter readings were over, and was glad to snatch a moment of repose before a short spring course in town began. Scarcely was this finished, when he was coquetting in his mind with an offer from Australia, and had already proposed to himself to throw in, as a piece of work by the way, a series of papers to be called *The Uncommercial Traveller Upside Down*. Meanwhile, a few readings for a charitable purpose in Paris, and a short summer course at St. James's Hall, completed this second series in the year 1863.

Whatever passing thoughts overwork by day or sleeplessness at night may have occasionally brought with them, Dickens himself would have been strangely surprised, as no doubt would have been the great body of

a public to which he was by this time about the best known man in England, had he been warned that weakness and weariness were not to be avoided even by a nature endowed with faculties so splendid and with an energy so conquering as his. He seemed to stand erect in the strength of his matured powers, equal as of old to any task which he set himself, and exulting, though with less buoyancy of spirit than of old, in the wreaths which continued to strew his path. Yet already the ranks of his contemporaries were growing thinner, while close to himself death was taking away members of the generation before, and of that after, his own. Among them was his mother—of whom his biography and his works have little to say or to suggest—and his second son. Happy events, too, had in the due course of things contracted the family circle at Gad's Hill. Of his intimates, he lost, in 1863, Augustus Egg ; and in 1864, John Leech, to whose genius he had himself formerly rendered eloquent homage.

A still older associate, the great painter Stanfield, survived till 1867; "no one of your father's friends," Dickens then wrote to Stanfield's son, "can ever have loved him more dearly than I always did, or can have better known the worth of his noble character." Yet another friend, who however, so far as I can gather, had not, at any time, belonged to Dickens' most familiar circle, had died on Christmas Eve, 1863—Thackeray, whom it had for some time become customary to compare or contrast with him as his natural rival. Yet in point of fact, save for the tender ness which, as with all humourists of the highest order, was an important element in their writings, and save for the influences of time and country to which they were both subject, there are hardly two other among our great humorists who have less in common. Their unlikeness shows

itself, among other things, in the use made by Thackeray of suggestions which it is difficult to believe he did not in the first instance owe to Dickens. Who would venture to call Captain Costigan a plagiarism from Mr. Snevellici, or to assert that Wenham and Wagg were copied from Pyke and Pluck, or that Major Pendennis—whose pardon one feels inclined to beg for the juxtaposition — was founded upon Major Bagstock, or the Old Campaigner in the *Newcomes* on the Old Soldier in *Copperfield?* But that suggestions were in these and perhaps in a few other instances derived from Dickens by Thackeray for some of his most masterly characters, it would, I think, be idle to deny. In any case, the style of these two great writers differed as profoundly as their way of looking at men and things. Yet neither of them lacked a thorough appreciation of the other's genius; and it is pleasant to remember that after paying in *Pendennis* a tribute to the purity of Dickens' books, Thackeray, in a public lecture referred to his supposed rival in a way which elicited from the latter the warmest of acknowledgments. It cannot be said that the memorial words, which after Thackeray's death Dickens was prevailed upon to contribute to the *Cornhill Magazine*, did more than justice to the great writer whom England had just lost; but it is well that the kindly and unstinting tribute of admiration should remain on record, to contradict any supposition that a disagreement which had some years previously disturbed the harmony of their intercourse, and of which the world had, according to its wont, made the most, had really estranged two generous minds from one another. The effort which on this occasion Dickens made, is in itself a proof of his kindly feeling towards Thackeray. Of Talfourd and Landor and Stanfield, he could write readily

after their deaths, but he frankly told Mr. Wilkie Collins that, "had he felt he could," he would most gladly have excused himself from writing the "couple of pages" about Thackeray.

Dickens, it should be remembered, was at no time a man of many friends. The mere dalliance of friendship was foreign to one who worked so indefatigably in his hours of recreation as well as of labour; and fellowship in work of one kind or another seems to have been, in later years at all events, the surest support to his intimacy. Yet he was most easily drawn, not only to those who could help him, but to those whom he could help in congenial pursuits and undertakings. Such was, no doubt, the origin of his friendship in these later years with an accomplished French actor on the English boards, whom, in a rather barren period of our theatrical history, Dickens may have been justified in describing as "far beyond anyone on our stage," and who certainly was an "admirable artist." In 1864, Mr Fechter had taken the Lyceum, the management of which he was to identify with a more elegant kind of melodrama than that long domesticated lower down the Strand; and Dickens was delighted to bestow on him counsel frankly sought and frankly given. As an author, too, he directly associated himself with the art of his friend.[1] For I may mention here by anticipation,

[1] One of the last things ever written by Dickens was a criticism of M. Fechter's acting, intended to introduce him to the American public. A false report, by the way, declared Dickens to have been the author of the dramatic version of Scott's novel, which at Christmas, 1865–66, was produced at the Lyceum, under the title of *The Master of Ravenswood*; but he allowed that he had done "a great deal towards and about the piece, having an earnest desire to put Scott, for once, on the stage in his own gallant manner."

that the last of the *All the Year Round* Christmas Numbers, the continuous story of *No Thoroughfare*, was written by Dickens and Mr. Wilkie Collins in 1867 with a direct eye to its subsequent adaptation to the stage, for which it actually was fitted by Mr. Wilkie Collins in the following year. The place of its production, the Adelphi, suited the broad effects and the rather conventional comic humour of the story and piece. From America, Dickens watched the preparation of the piece with unflagging interest; and his innate and irrepressible genius for stage-management reveals itself in the following passage from a letter written by him to an American friend soon after his return to England: "*No Thoroughfare* is very shortly coming out in Paris, where it is now in active rehearsal. It is still playing here, but without Fechter, who has been very ill. He and Wilkie raised so many pieces of stage-effect here, that, unless I am quite satisfied with the report, I shall go over and try my stage-managerial hand at the Vaudeville Theatre. I particularly want the drugging and attempted robbery in the bedroom-scene at the Swiss Inn to be done to the sound of a waterfall rising and falling with the wind. Although in the very opening of that scene they speak of the waterfall, and listen to it, nobody thought of its mysterious music. I could make it, with a good stage-carpenter, in an hour."

Great Expectations had been finished in 1860, and already in the latter part of 1861, the year which comprised the main portion of his second series of readings, he had been thinking of a new story. He had even found a title—the unlucky title which he afterwards adopted—but in 1862 the tempting Australian invitation had been a serious obstacle in his way. "I can force myself to go

aboard a ship, and I can force myself to do at that reading-desk what I have done a hundred times; but whether, with all this unsettled fluctuating distress in my mind, I could force an original book out of it, is another question." Nor was it the "unsettled fluctuating distress" which made it a serious effort for him to attempt another longer fiction. Dickens shared with most writers the experience that both the inventive power and the elasticity of memory decline with advancing years. Already since the time when he was thinking of writing *Little Dorrit* it had become his habit to enter in a book kept for the purpose, memoranda for possible future use, hints for subjects of stories,[1] scenes, situations, and characters; thoughts and fancies of all kinds; titles for possible books. Of these, *Somebody's Luggage*, *Our Mutual Friend*, and *No Thoroughfare*—the last an old fancy revived—came to honourable use; as did many names, both christian and surnames, and combinations of both. Thus Bradley Headstone's *prænomen* was derived directly from the lists of the Education Department, and the Lammles and the Stiltstalkings, with Mr. Merdle and the Dorrits, existed as names before the characters were fitted to them. All this, though no doubt in part attributable to the playful readiness of an observation never to be caught asleep, points in the direction of a desire to be securely provided with an armoury of which, in earlier days, he would have taken slight thought.

Gradually, indeed, so far as I know, more gradually than in the case of any other of his stories, he had built up the tale for which he had determined on the title of

[1] Dickens undoubtedly had a genius for titles. Among some which he suggested for the use of a friend and contributor to his journal, are "*What will he do with it?*" and "*Can he forgive her?*"

Our Mutual Friend, and slowly, and without his old self-confidence, he had, in the latter part of 1863, set to work upon it. "I want to prepare it for the spring, but I am determined not to begin to publish with less than four numbers done. I see my opening perfectly, with the one main line on which the story is to turn, and if I don't strike while the iron (meaning myself) is hot, I shall drift off again, and have to go through all this uneasiness once more." For, unfortunately, he had resolved on returning to the old twenty-number measure for his new story. Begun with an effort, *Our Mutual Friend*—the publication of which extended from May, 1864, to November, 1865—was completed under difficulties, and difficulties of a kind hitherto unknown to Dickens. In February, 1865, as an immediate consequence, perhaps, of exposure at a time when depression of spirits rendered him less able than usual to bear it, he had a severe attack of illness, of which Forster says that it "put a broad mark between his past life and what remained to him of the future." From this time forward he felt a lameness in his left foot, which continued to trouble him at intervals during the remainder of his life, and which finally communicated itself to the left hand. A comparison of times, however, convinced Forster that the real origin of this ailment was to be sought in general causes.

In 1865, as the year wore on, and the pressure of the novel still continued, he felt that he was "working himself into a damaged state," and was near to that which has greater terrors for natures like his than for more placid temperaments—breaking down. So, in May, he went first to the seaside and then to France. On his return—it was the 9th of June, the date of his death five years

afterwards—he was in the railway train which met with a fearful accident at Staplehurst, in Kent. His carriage was the only passenger-carriage in the train which, when the bridge gave way, was not thrown over into the stream. He was able to escape out of the window, to make his way in again for his brandy-flask and the MS. of a number of *Our Mutual Friend* which he had left behind him, to clamber down the brickwork of the bridge for water, to do what he could towards rescuing his unfortunate fellow-travellers, and to aid the wounded and the dying. "I have," he wrote, in describing the scene, "a—I don't know what to call it: constitutional, I suppose—presence of mind, and was not in the least fluttered at the time. . . . But in writing these scanty words of recollection, I feel the shake and am obliged to stop." Nineteen months afterwards, when on a hurried reading tour in the North, he complains to Miss Hogarth of the effect of the railway shaking which since the Staplehurst accident "tells more and more." It is clear how serious a shock the accident had caused. He never, Miss Hogarth thinks, quite recovered it. Yet it might have acted less disastrously upon a system not already nervously weakened. As evidence of the decline of Dickens' nervous power, I hardly know whether it is safe to refer to the gradual change in his handwriting, which in his last years is a melancholy study.

All these circumstances should be taken into account in judging of Dickens' last completed novel. The author would not have been himself, had he, when once fairly engaged upon his work, failed to feel something of his old self-confidence. Nor was this feeling, which he frankly confessed to Mr. Wilkie Collins, altogether unwar-

ranted. *Our Mutual Friend*[1] is, like the rest of Dickens' later writings, carefully and skilfully put together as a story. No exception is to be taken to it on the ground that the identity on which much of the plot hinges is long foreseen by the reader; for this, as Dickens told his critics in his postscript, had been part of his design, and was, in fact, considering the general nature of the story, almost indispensable. The defect rather lies in the absence of that element of uncertainty which is needed in order to sustain the interest. The story is, no doubt, ingeniously enough constructed, but admiration of an ingenious construction is insufficient to occupy the mind of a reader through an inevitable disentanglement. Moreover, some of the machinery, though cleverly contrived, cannot be said to work easily. Thus, the *ruse* of the excellent Boffin in playing the part of a skinflint might pass as a momentary device, but its inherent improbability, together with the likelihood of its leading to an untoward result, makes its protraction undeniably tedious. It is not, however, in my opinion at least, in the matter of construction that *Our Mutual Friend* presents a painful contrast with earlier works produced, like it, "on a large canvas." The conduct of the story as a whole is fully vigorous enough to enchain the attention; and in portions of it the hand of the master displays its unique power. He is at his best in the whole of the waterside scenes, both where The Six Jolly Fellowship Porters (identified by zealous dis-

[1] This title has helped to extinguish the phrase of which it consists. Few would now be found to agree with the last clause of Flora's parenthesis in *Little Dorrit*: "Our mutual friend—too cold a word for me; at least I don't mean that, very proper expression, mutual friend."

coverers with a tavern called The Two Brewers), lies like an oasis in the midst of a desert of ill-favoured tidal deposits, and where Rogue Riderhood has his lair at the lock higher up the river. A marvellous union of observation and imagination was needed for the picturing of a world in which this amphibious monster has his being; and never did Dickens' inexhaustible knowledge of the physiognomy of the Thames and its banks stand him in better stead than in these powerful episodes. It is unfortunate, though in accordance with the common fate of heroes and heroines, that Lizzie Hexham should, from the outset, have to discard the colouring of her surroundings, and to talk the conventional dialect as well as express the conventional sentiments of the heroic world. Only at the height of the action she ceases to be commonplace, and becomes entitled to be remembered among the true heroines of fiction. A more unusual figure, of the half-pathetic, half-grotesque kind for which Dickens had a peculiar liking, is Lizzie's friend, the dolls' dressmaker, into whom he has certainly infused an element of genuine sentiment; her protector, Riah, on the contrary, is a mere stage-saint, though by this character Dickens appears to have actually hoped to redeem the aspersions he was supposed to have cast upon the Jews, as if Riah could have redeemed Fagin any more than Sheva redeemed Shylock.

But in this book whole episodes and parts of the plot through which the mystery of John Harmon winds its length along, are ill adapted for giving pleasure to any reader. The whole Boffin, Wegg, and Venus business—if the term may pass—is extremely wearisome; the character of Mr. Venus, in particular, seems altogether unconnected or unarticulated with the general plot, on which, indeed, it is but an accidental excrescence. In the Wilfer family

there are the outlines of some figures of genuine humour, but the outlines only; nor is Bella raised into the sphere of the charming out of that of the pert and skittish. A more ambitious attempt, and a more noteworthy failure, was the endeavour to give to the main plot of this novel such a satiric foil as the Circumlocution Office had furnished to the chief action of *Little Dorrit*, in a caricature of society at large, its surface varnish and its internal rottenness. The Barnacles, and those who deemed it their duty to rally round the Barnacles, had, we saw, felt themselves hard hit; but what sphere or section of society could feel itself specially caricatured in the Veneerings, or in their associates — the odious Lady Tippins, the impossibly brutal Podsnap, Fascination Fledgeby, and the Lammles, a couple which suggests nothing but antimony and the Chamber of Horrors? Caricature such as this, representing no society that has ever in any part of the world pretended to be "good," corresponds to the wild rhetoric of the superfluous Betty Higden episode against the "gospel according to Podsnappery;" but it is, in truth, satire from which both wit and humour have gone out. An angry, often almost spasmodic, mannerism has to supply their place. Among the personages moving in "society" are two which, as playing serious parts in the progress of the plot, the author is necessarily obliged to seek to endow with the flesh and blood of real human beings. Yet it is precisely in these—the friends Eugene and Mortimer—that, in the earlier part of the novel at all events, the constraint of the author's style seems least relieved; the dialogues between these two Templars have an unnaturalness about them as intolerable as euphuism or the effeminacies of the Augustan age. It is true that, when the story reaches

its tragic height, the character of Eugene is borne along with it, and his affectations are forgotten. But in previous parts of the book, where he poses as a wit, and is evidently meant for a gentleman, he fails to make good his claims to either character. Even the skilfully contrived contrast between the rivals Eugene Wrayburn and the schoolmaster Bradley Headstone—through whom and through whose pupil, Dickens, by the way, dealt another blow against a system of mental training founded upon facts alone—fails to bring out the conception of Eugene which the author manifestly had in his mind. Lastly, the old way of reconciling dissonances—a marriage which "society" calls a *mésalliance*—has rarely furnished a lamer ending than here; and, had the unwritten laws of English popular fiction permitted, a tragic close would have better accorded with the sombre hue of the most powerful portions of this curiously unequal romance.

The effort—for such it was—of *Our Mutual Friend* had not been over for more than a few months, when Dickens accepted a proposal for thirty nights' readings from the Messrs. Chappell; and by April, 1866, he was again hard at work, flying across the country into Lancashire and Scotland, and back to his temporary London residence in Southwick Place, Hyde Park. In any man more capable than Dickens of controlling the restlessness which consumed him, the acceptance of this offer would have been incomprehensible; for his heart had been declared out of order by his physician, and the patient had shown himself in some degree awake to the significance of this opinion. But the readings were begun and accomplished notwithstanding, though not without warnings, on which he insisted on putting his own interpretation. Sleeplessness aggravated fatigue, and stimulants were already neces-

sary to enable him to do the work of his readings without discomfort. Meanwhile, some weeks before they were finished, he had been induced to enter into negotiations about a further engagement to begin at the end of the year. Time was to be left for the Christmas Number, which this year could hardly find its scene anywhere else than at a railway junction; and the readings were not to extend over forty nights, which seem ultimately to have been increased to fifty. This second series, which included a campaign in Ireland—brilliantly successful despite snow and rain, and Fenians—was over in May. Then came the climax, for America now claimed her share of the great author for her public halls and chapels and lecture-theatres; and the question of the summer and autumn was whether or not to follow the sound of the distant dollar. It was closely debated between Dickens and his friend Forster and Wills, and he describes himself as "tempest-tossed" with doubts; but his mind had inclined in one direction from the first, and the matter was virtually decided when he resolved to send a confidential agent to make inquiries on the spot. Little imported another and grave attack in his foot; the trusty Mr. Dolby's report was irresistible. Eighty readings within half a year was the estimated number, with profits amounting to over fifteen thousand pounds. The gains actually made were nearly five thousand pounds in excess of this calculation.

A farewell banquet, under the presidency of Lord Lytton, gave the favourite author Godspeed on his journey to the larger half of his public; on the 9th of November he sailed from Liverpool, and on the 19th landed at Boston. The voyage, on which, with his old buoyancy, he had contrived to make himself master of the modest

revels of the saloon, seems to have done him good, or at least to have made him, as usual, impatient to be at his task. Barely arrived, he is found reporting himself "so well, that I am constantly chafing at not having begun to-night, instead of this night week." By December, however, he was at his reading-desk, first at Boston, where he met with the warmest of welcomes, and then at New York, where there was a run upon the tickets, which he described with his usual excited delight. The enthusiasm of his reception by the American public must have been heightened by the thought that it was now or never for them to see him face to face, and, bygones being bygones, to testify to him their admiration. But there may have been some foundation for his discovery that some signs of agitation on his part were expected in return, and "that it would have been taken as a suitable compliment if I would stagger on the platform, and instantly drop, overpowered by the spectacle before me." It was but a sad Christmas which he spent with his faithful Dolby at their New York inn, tired, and with a "genuine American catarrh upon him," of which he never freed himself during his stay in the country. Hardly had he left the doctor's hands, than he was about again, reading in Boston and New York and their more immediate neighbourhood—that is within six or seven hours by railway—till February; and then, in order to stimulate his public, beginning a series of appearances at more distant places before returning to his starting-points. His whole tour included, besides a number of New England towns, Philadelphia, Baltimore and Washington, and in the north Cleveland and Buffalo. Canada and the West were struck out of the programme, the latter chiefly because exciting political matters were beginning to absorb public attention.

During these journeyings Dickens gave himself up altogether to the business of his readings, only occasionally allowing himself to accept the hospitality proffered him on every side. Thus only could he breast the difficulties of his enterprise; for, as I have said, his health was never good during the whole of his visit, and his exertions were severe, though eased by the self-devotion of his attendants, of which, as of his constant kindness, both serious and sportive, towards them, it is touching to read. Already in January, he describes himself as not seldom "so dead beat" at the close of a reading "that they lay me down on a sofa, after I have been washed and dressed, and I lie there, extremely faint, for a quarter of an hour," and as suffering from intolerable sleeplessness at night. His appetite was equally disordered, and he lived mainly on stimulants. Why had he condemned himself to such a life?

When at last he could declare the stress of his work over, he described himself as "nearly used up. Climate, distance, catarrh, travelling, and hard work, have begun —I may say so, now they are nearly all over—to tell heavily upon me. Sleeplessness besets me; and if I had engaged to go on into May, I think I must have broken down." Indeed, but for his wonderful energy and the feeling of exultation which is derived from a heavy task nearly accomplished, he would have had to follow the advice of "Longfellow and all the Cambridge men," and give in nearly at the last. But he persevered through the farewell readings, both at Boston and at New York, though on the night before the last reading in America, he told Dolby that if he "had to read but twice more, instead of once, he couldn't do it." This last reading of all was given at New York on April 20th, two days after a farewell banquet at Delmonico's. It was

when speaking on this occasion that, very naturally moved by the unalloyed welcome which had greeted him in whatever part of the States he had visited, he made the declaration already mentioned, promising to perpetuate his grateful sense of his recent American experiences. This apology, which was no apology, at least remains one among many proofs of the fact, that with Dickens kindness never fell on a thankless soil.

The merry month of May was still young in the Kentish fields and lanes when the master of Gad's Hill Place was home again at last. "I had not been at sea three days on the passage home," he wrote to his friend Mrs. Watson, "when I became myself again." It was, however, too much, when "a 'deputation'—two in number, of whom only one could get into my cabin, while the other looked in at my window—came to ask me to read to the passengers that evening in the saloon. I respectfully replied that sooner than do it I would assault the captain and be put in irons." Alas! he was already fast bound, by an engagement concluded soon after he had arrived in Boston, to a final series of readings at home. "Farewell" is a difficult word to say for anyone who has grown accustomed to the stimulating excitement of a public stage, and it is not wonderful that Dickens should have wished to see the faces of his familiar friends—the English public—once more. But the engagement to which he had set his hand was for a farewell of a hundred readings, at the recompense of eight thousand pounds, in addition to expenses and percentage. It is true that he had done this before he had fully realised the effect of his American exertions; but even so, there was a terrible unwisdom in the promise. These last readings—and he alone is, in common fairness, to be held responsible for the fact—cut

short a life from which much noble fruit might still have been expected for our literature, and which in any case might have been prolonged as a blessing beyond all that gold can buy to those who loved him.

Meanwhile, he had allowed himself a short respite, before resuming his labours in October. It was not more, his friends thought, than he needed, for much of his old buoyancy seemed to them to be wanting in him, except when hospitality or the intercourse of friendship called it forth. What a charm there still was in his genial humour his letters would suffice to show. It does one good to read his description to his kind American friends Mr. and Mrs. Fields of his tranquillity at Gad's Hill: "Divers birds sing here all day, and the nightingales all night. The place is lovely, and in perfect order. I have put five mirrors in the Swiss châlet where I write, and they reflect and refract in all kinds of ways the leaves that are quivering at the windows, and the great fields of waving corn, and the sail-dotted river. My room is up among the branches of the trees, and the birds and the butterflies fly in and out, and the green branches shoot in at the open windows, and the lights and shadows of the clouds come and go with the rest of the company. The scent of the flowers, and indeed of everything that is growing for miles and miles, is most delicious."

Part of this rare leisure he generously devoted to the preparation for the press of a volume of literary remains from the pen of an old friend. The *Religious Opinions of Chauncey Hare Townshend* should not be altogether overlooked by those interested in Dickens, to whom the loose undogmatic theology of his friend commended itself as readily as the sincere religious feeling underlying it. I cannot say what answer Dickens would have returned

to an inquiry as to his creed, but the nature of his religious opinions is obvious enough. Born in the Church of England, he had so strong an aversion from what seemed to him dogmatism of any kind, that he for a time—in 1843—connected himself with a Unitarian congregation; and to Unitarian views his own probably continued during his life most nearly to approach. He described himself as "morally wide asunder from Rome," but the religious conceptions of her community cannot have been a matter of anxious inquiry with him, while he was too liberal-minded to be, unless occasionally, aggressive in his Protestantism. For the rest, his mind, though imaginative, was without mystical tendencies, while for the transitory superstitions of the day it was impossible but that he should entertain the contempt which they deserved; "although," he writes—

> I regard with a hushed and solemn fear, the mysteries, between which, and this state of existence, is interposed the barrier of the great trial and change that fall on all the things that live; and, although I have not the audacity to pretend that I know anything of them, I cannot reconcile the mere banging of doors, ringing of bells, creaking of boards, and such like insignificances, with the majestic beauty and pervading analogy of all the Divine rules that I am permitted to understand.

His piety was undemonstrative and sincere, as his books alone would suffice to prove; and he seems to have sought to impress upon his children those religious truths with the acceptance and practice of which he remained himself content. He loved the New Testament, and had, after some fashion of his own, paraphrased the Gospel narrative for the use of his children; but he thought that "half the misery and hypocrisy of the Christian world arises from a stubborn determination to refuse the New Testament as a sufficient guide in itself, and to force the Old Testament into alliance with it—whereof comes all manner

of camel-swallowing and of gnat-straining." Of Puritanism in its modern forms he was an uncompromising, and no doubt a conscientious, opponent; and though, with perfect sincerity, he repelled the charge that his attacks upon cant were attacks upon religion, yet their *animus* is such as to make the misinterpretation intelligible. His dissenting ministers are of the *Bartholomew Fair* species, and though, in his later books, a good clergyman here and there makes his modest appearance, the balance can hardly be said to be satisfactorily redressed.

The performance of this pious office was not the only kind act he did after his return from America. Of course, however, his own family was nearest to his heart. No kinder or more judicious words were ever addressed by a father to his children than those which, about this time, he wrote to one of his sons, then beginning a successful career at Cambridge, and to another—the youngest—who was setting forth for Australia, to join an elder brother already established in that country. "Poor Plorn," he afterwards wrote, "is gone to Australia. It was a hard parting at the last. He seemed to me to become once more my youngest and favourite child as the day drew near, and I did not think I could have been so shaken."

In October his "farewell" readings began. He had never had his heart more in the work than now. Curiously enough, not less than two proposals had reached him during this autumn—one from Birmingham and the other from Edinburgh—that he should allow himself to be put forward as a candidate for Parliament; but he declined to entertain either, though in at least one of the two cases the prospects of success would not have been small. His views of political and parliamentary life had not changed since he had written to Bulwer Lytton in 1865: "Would

there not seem to be something horribly rotten in the system of political life, when one stands amazed how any man, not forced into it by his position, as you are, can bear to live it?" Indeed, they had hardly changed since the days when he had come into personal contact with them as a reporter. In public and in private he had never ceased to ridicule our English system of party, and to express his contempt for the Legislature and all its works. He had, however, continued to take a lively interest in public affairs, and his letters contain not a few shrewd remarks on both home and foreign questions. Like most liberal minds of his age, he felt a warm sympathy for the cause of Italy; and the English statesman whom he appears to have most warmly admired was Lord Russell, in whose good intentions neither friends nor adversaries were wont to lose faith. Meanwhile, his radicalism gradually became of the most thoroughly independent type, though it interfered neither with his approval of the proceedings in Jamaica as an example of strong government, nor with his scorn of "the meeting of jawbones and asses," held against Governor Eyre at Manchester. The political questions, however, which really moved him deeply were those social problems to which his sympathy for the poor had always directed his attention: the poor law, temperance, Sunday observance, punishment and prisons, labour and strikes. On all these heads sentiment guided his judgment, but he spared no pains to convince himself that he was in the right: and he was always generous, as when, notwithstanding his interest in *Household Words*, he declared himself unable to advocate the repeal of the paper duty for a moment, "as against the soap duty, or any other pressing on the mass of the poor."

Thus he found no difficulty in adhering to the course he

had marked out for himself. The subject which now occupied him before all others was a scheme for a new reading, with which it was his wish to vary and to intensify the success of the series on which he was engaged. This was no other than a selection of scenes from *Oliver Twist*, culminating in the scene of the murder of Nancy by Sikes, which, before producing it in public, he resolved to "try" upon a select private audience. The trial was a brilliant success; "the public," exclaimed a famous actress who was present, "have been looking out for a sensation these last fifty years or so, and, by heaven, they have got it!" Accordingly, from January, 1869, it formed one of the most frequent of his readings, and the effort which it involved counted for much in the collapse which was to follow. Never were the limits between reading and acting more thoroughly effaced by Dickens, and never was the production of an extraordinary effect more equally shared by author and actor. But few who witnessed this extraordinary performance can have guessed the elaborate preparation bestowed upon it, which is evident from the following notes (by Mr. C. Kent) on the book used in it by the reader:

> What is as striking as anything in all this reading, however—that is, in the reading copy of it now lying before us as we write—is the mass of hints as to the byplay in the stage directions for himself, so to speak, scattered up and down the margin. "Fagin raised his right hand, and shook his trembling forefinger in the air," is there on page 101 in print. Beside it, on the margin in MS., is the word "*Action.*" Not a word of it was said. It was simply *done*. Again, immediately below that, on the same page—Sikes *loquitur*: "Oh! you haven't, haven't you?" passing a pistol into a more convenient pocket ("*Action*" again in MS. on the margin). Not a word was said about the pistol. . . . So again, afterwards, as a rousing self-direction, one sees notified in MS. on page 107, the grim stage direction, "*Murder coming!*"

The "Murder" was frequently read by Dickens not less than four times a week during the early months of 1869, in which year, after beginning in Ireland, he had been continually travelling to and fro between various parts of Great Britain and town. Already in February the old trouble in his foot had made itself felt, but, as usual, it had long been disregarded. On the 10th of April he had been entertained at Liverpool, in St. George's Hall, at a banquet presided over by Lord Dufferin, and in a genial speech had tossed back the ball to Lord Houghton, who had pleasantly bantered him for his unconsciousness of the merits of the House of Lords. Ten days afterwards, he was to read at Preston, but, feeling uneasy about himself, had reported his symptoms to his doctor in London. The latter hastened down to Preston, and persuaded Dickens to accompany him back to town, where, after a consultation, it was determined that the readings must be stopped for the current year, and that reading combined with travelling must never be resumed. What his sister-in-law and daughter feel themselves justified in calling "the beginning of the end" had come at last.

With his usual presence of mind, Dickens at once perceived the imperative necessity of interposing "as it were, a fly-leaf in the book of my life, in which nothing should be written from without for a brief season of a few weeks." But he insisted that the combination of the reading and the travelling was alone to be held accountable for his having found himself feeling, "for the first time in my life, giddy, jarred, shaken, faint, uncertain of voice and sight and tread and touch, and dull of spirit." Meanwhile he for once kept quiet, first in London, and then at Gad's Hill. "This last summer," say

those who did most to make it bright for him, "was a very happy one," and gladdened by the visits of many friends. On the retirement, also on account of ill-health, from *All the Year Round*, of his second self, Mr. W. H. Wills, he was fortunately able at once to supply the vacant place by the appointment to it of his eldest son, who seems to have inherited that sense of lucid order which was among his father's most distinctive characteristics. He travelled very little this year, though in September he made a speech at Birmingham on behalf of his favourite Midland Institute, delivering himself, at its conclusion, of an antithetical radical commonplace, which, being misreported or misunderstood, was commented upon with much unnecessary wonderment. With a view to avoiding the danger of excessive fatigue, the latter part of the year was chiefly devoted to writing in advance part of his new book, which, like *Great Expectations*, was to grow up, and to be better for growing up, in his own Kentish home, and almost within sound of the bells of "Cloisterham" Cathedral. But the new book was never to be finished.

The first number of *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* was not published till one more short series of twelve readings, given in London during a period extending from January to March, was at an end. He had obtained Sir Thomas Watson's consent to his carrying out this wish, largely caused by the desire to compensate the Messrs. Chappell in some measure for the disappointment to which he had been obliged to subject them by the interruption of his longer engagement. Thus, though the Christmas of 1869 had brought with it another warning of trouble in the foot, the year 1870 opened busily, and early in January Dickens established himself for the season at 5, Hyde

Park Place. Early in the month he made another speech at Birmingham; but the readings were strictly confined to London. On the other hand, it was not to be expected that the "Murder" would be excluded from the list. It was read in January, to an audience of actors and actresses; and it is pleasant to think that he was able to testify to his kindly feeling towards their profession on one of the last occasions when he appeared on his own stage. "I set myself," he wrote, "to carrying out of themselves and their observation, those who were bent on watching how the effects were got, and, I believe, I succeeded. Coming back to it again, however, I feel it was madness ever to do it so continuously. My ordinary pulse is seventy-two, and it runs up under this effort to one hundred and twelve." Yet this fatal reading was repeated thrice more before the series closed, and with even more startling results upon the reader. The careful observations made by his physician, however, show that the excitement of the last readings was altogether too great for any man to have endured much longer. At last, on March 16th, the night came which closed fifteen years of personal relations between the English public and its favourite author, such as are, after all, unparalleled in the history of our literature. His farewell words were few and simple; and referred with dignity to his resolution to devote himself henceforth exclusively to his calling as an author, and to his hope that in but two short weeks' time his audience "might enter, in their own homes, on a new series of readings at which his assistance would be indispensable."

Of the short time which remained to him his last book was the chief occupation; and an association thus clings to the *Mystery of Edwin Drood*, which would, in any

case, incline us to treat this fragment—for it was to be no more—with tenderness. One would, indeed, hardly be justified in asserting that this story, like that which Thackeray left behind him in the same unfinished state, bade fair to become a masterpiece in its author's later manner; there is much that is forced in its humour, while as to the working out of the chief characters our means of judgment are of course incomplete. The outline of the design, on the other hand, presents itself with tolerable clearness to the minds of most readers of insight or experience, though the story deserves its name of a mystery, instead of, like *Our Mutual Friend*, seeming merely to withhold a necessary explanation. And it must be allowed that few plots have ever been more effectively laid than this, of which the untying will never be known. Three such personages in relation to a deed of darkness as Jasper for its contriver, Durden for its unconscious accomplice, and Deputy for its self-invited witness, and all so naturally connecting themselves with the locality of the perpetration of the crime, assuredly could not have been brought together, except by one who had gradually attained to mastership in the adaptation of characters to the purposes of a plot. Still, the strongest impression left upon the reader of this fragment, is the evidence it furnishes of Dickens having retained to the last powers which were most peculiarly and distinctively his own. Having skilfully brought into connexion, for the purposes of his plot, two such strangely-contrasted spheres of life and death, as the cathedral close at "Cloisterham" and an opium-smoking den in one of the obscurest corners of London, he is enabled, by his imaginative and observing powers, not only to *realise* the picturesque elements in both scenes, but also to convert them into a twofold background, accom-

modating itself to the most vivid hues of human passion. This is to bring out what he was wont to call "the romantic aspect of familiar things." With the physiognomy of Cloisterham—otherwise Rochester—with its cathedral, and its "monastery" ruin, and its "Minor Canon Corner," and its "Nuns' House"—otherwise "Eastgate House," in the High Street—he was, of course, closely acquainted; but he had never reproduced its features with so artistic a cunning, and the Mystery of Edwin Drood will always haunt Bishop Gundulph's venerable building and its tranquil precincts. As for the opium-smoking, we have his own statement, that what he described he saw—"exactly as he had described it, penny ink-bottle and all—down in Shadwell" in the autumn of 1869. "A couple of the Inspectors of Lodging-houses knew the woman, and took me to her as I was making a round with them, to see for myself the working of Lord Shaftesbury's Bill." Between these scenes, John Jasper—a figure conceived with singular force—moves to and fro, preparing his mysterious design. No story of the kind ever began more finely; and we may be excused from inquiring whether signs of diminished vigour of invention and freshness of execution are to be found in other and less prominent portions of the great novelist's last work.

Before, in this year 1870, Dickens withdrew from London to Gad's Hill, with the hope of there in quiet carrying his all but half-finished task to its close, his health had not been satisfactory; he had suffered from time to time in his foot, and his weary and aged look was observed by many of his friends. He was able to go occasionally into society; though at the last dinner-party which he attended—it was at Lord Houghton's, to meet the Prince of Wales and the King of the Belgians—he had been unable to

mount above the dining-room floor. Already in March the Queen had found a suitable opportunity for inviting him to wait upon her at Buckingham Palace, when she had much gratified him by her kindly manner; and a few days later he made his appearance at the levee. These acknowledgments of his position as an English author were as they should be; no others were offered, nor is it a matter of regret that there should have been no titles to inscribe on his tomb. He was also twice seen on one of those public occasions which no eloquence graced so readily and so pleasantly as his: once in April, at the dinner for the Newsvendors' Charity, when he spoke of the existence among his humble clients of that "feeling of brotherhood and sympathy which is worth much to all men, or they would herd with wolves;" and once in May—only a day or two before he went home into the country—when at the Royal Academy dinner, he paid a touching tribute to the eminent painter, Daniel Maclise, who in the good old days had been much like a brother to himself. Another friend and companion, Mark Lemon, passed away a day or two afterwards; and with the most intimate of all, his future biographer, he lamented the familiar faces of their companions—not one of whom had passed his sixtieth year—upon which they were not to look again. On the 30th of May he was once more at Gad's Hill.

Here he forthwith set to work on his book, taking walks as usual, though of no very great length. On Thursday, the 9th of June, he had intended to pay his usual weekly visit to the office of his journal, and accordingly, on the 8th, devoted the afternoon as well as the morning to finishing the sixth number of the story. When he came across to the house from the châlet before dinner, he seemed, to his sister-in-law, who alone of the family was at home,

tired and silent, and, no sooner had they sat down to dinner, than she noticed how seriously ill he looked. It speedily became evident that a fit was upon him. "Come and lie down," she entreated. "Yes, on the ground," he said, very distinctly—these were the last words he spoke—and he slid from her arm, and fell upon the floor. He was laid on a couch in the room, and there he remained unconscious almost to the last. He died at ten minutes past six on the evening of the 9th—by which time his daughters and his eldest son had been able to join the faithful watcher by his side; his sister and his son Henry arrived when all was over.

His own desire had been to be buried near Gad's Hill; though at one time he is said to have expressed a wish to lie in a disused graveyard, which is still pointed out, in a secluded corner in the moat of Rochester Castle. Preparations had been made accordingly, when the Dean and Chapter of Rochester urged a request that his remains might be placed in their Cathedral. This was assented to; but at the last moment the Dean of Westminster gave expression to a widespread wish that the great national writer might lie in the national Abbey. There he was buried on June 14th, without the slightest attempt at the pomp which he had deprecated in his will, and which he almost fiercely condemned in more than one of his writings. "The funeral," writes Dean Stanley, whose own dust now mingles with that of so many illustrious dead, "was strictly private. It took place at an early hour in the summer morning, the grave having been dug in secret the night before, and the vast solitary space of the Abbey was occupied only by the small band of the mourners, and the Abbey clergy, who, without any music except the occasional peal of the organ, read the funeral service. For days the spot was visited

by thousands; many were the tears shed by the poorer visitors. He rests beside Sheridan, Garrick, and Henderson"—the first actor ever buried in the Abbey. Associations of another kind cluster near; but his generous spirit would not have disdained the thought that he would seem even in death the players' friend.

A plain memorial brass on the walls of Rochester Cathedral vindicates the share which the ancient city and its neighbourhood will always have in his fame. But most touching of all it is to think of him under the trees of his own garden on the hill, in the pleasant home where, after so many labours and so many wanderings, he died in peace, and as one who had earned his rest.

CHAPTER VII.

THE FUTURE OF DICKENS' FAME.

THERE is no reason whatever to believe that in the few years which have gone by since Dickens' death the delight taken in his works throughout England and North America, as well as elsewhere, has diminished, or that he is not still one of our few most popular writers. The mere fact that his popularity has remained such since, nearly half a century ago he, like a beam of spring sunshine, first made the world gay, is a sufficient indication of the influence which he must have exercised upon his age. In our world of letters his followers have been many, though naturally enough those whose original genius impelled them to follow their own course soonest ceased to be his imitators. Among these I know no more signal instance than the great novelist whose surpassing merits he had very swiftly recognised in her earliest work. For though in the *Scenes of Clerical Life* George Eliot seems to be, as it were, hesitating between Dickens and Thackeray as the models of her humorous writing, reminiscences of the former are unmistakeable in the opening of *Amos Barton*, in *Mr. Gilfil's Love-Story*, in *Janet's Repentance*; and though it would be hazardous to trace his influence in the domestic scenes in *Adam Bede*, neither a Christmas exordium in one of the books of *The Mill on the Floss*.

nor the Sam Weller-like freshness of Bob Jakin in the same powerful story, is altogether the author's own. Two of the most successful continental novelists of the present day have gone to school with Dickens: the one the truly national writer whose *Debit and Credit*, a work largely in the manner of his English model, has, as a picture of modern life, remained unexcelled in German literature;[1] the other, the brilliant Southerner, who may write as much of the *History of his Books* as his public may desire to learn, but who cannot write the pathos of Dickens altogether out of *Jack*, or his farcical fun out of *Le Nabab*. And again—for I am merely illustrating, not attempting to describe, the literary influence of Dickens—who could fail to trace in the Californian studies and sketches of Bret Harte elements of humour and of pathos, to which that genuinely original author would be the last to deny that his great English "Master" was no stranger?

Yet popularity and literary influence, however wide and however strong, often pass away as they have come; and in no field of literature are there many reputations which the sea of time fails before very long to submerge. In prose fiction—a comparatively young literary growth—they are certainly not the most numerous, perhaps because on works of this species the manners and style of an age most readily impress themselves, rendering them proportionately strange to the ages that come after. In the works of even the lesser playwrights who pleased the liberal times of Elizabeth, and in lyrics of even secondary merit that were admired

[1] In the last volume of his *magnum opus* of historical fiction, Gustav Freytag, describes "Boz" as about the year 1846, filling with boundless enthusiasm the hearts of young men and maidens in a small Silesian country town.

by fantastic Caroline cavaliers, we can still take pleasure. But who can read many of the "standard" novels published as lately even as the days of George the Fourth? The speculation is, therefore, not altogether idle, whether Dickens saw truly when labouring, as most great men do labour, in the belief that his work was not only for a day. Literary eminence was the only eminence he desired, while it was one of the very healthiest elements in his character, that whatever he was, he was thoroughly. He would not have told anyone, as Fielding's author told Mr. Booth at the sponging-house, that romance-writing "is certainly the easiest work in the world;" nor being what he was, could he ever have found it such in his own case. "Whoever," he declared, "is devoted to an art must be content to give himself wholly up to it, and to find his recompense in it." And not only did he obey his own labour-laws, but in the details of his work as a man of letters he spared no pains and no exercise of self-control. 'I am," he generously told a beginner, to whom he was counselling patient endeavour, "an impatient and impulsive person myself, but it has been for many years the constant effort of my life to practise at my desk what I preach to you." Never, therefore has a man of letters had a better claim to be judged by his works. As he expressly said in his will, he wished for no other monument than his writings; and with their aid we, who already belong to a new generation, and whose children will care nothing for the gossip and the scandal of which he, like most popular celebrities, was in his lifetime privileged or doomed to become the theme, may seek to form some definite conception of his future place among illustrious Englishmen.

It would, of course, be against all experience to suppose that to future generations Dickens, as a writer, will be all

that he was to his own. Much that constitutes the subject, or at least furnishes the background, of his pictures of English life, like the Fleet Prison and the Marshalsea, has vanished, or is being improved off the face of the land. The form, again, of Dickens' principal works may become obsolete, as it was in a sense accidental. He was the most popular novelist of his day; but should prose fiction, or even the full and florid species of it which has enjoyed so long-lived a favour ever be out of season, the popularity of Dickens' books must experience an inevitable diminution. And even before that day arrives, not all the works in a particular species of literature that may to a particular age have seemed destined to live, will have been preserved. Nothing is more surely tested by time than that originality which is the secret of a writer's continuing to be famous, and continuing to be read.

Dickens was not—and to whom in these latter ages of literature could such a term be applied?—a self-made writer. in the sense that he owed nothing to those who had gone before him. He was most assuredly no classical scholar,—how could he have been? But I should hesitate to call him an ill-read man, though he certainly was neither a great nor a catholic reader, and though he could not help thinking about *Nicholas Nickleby* while he was reading the *Curse of Kehama*. In his own branch of literature his judgment was sound and sure-footed. It was of course a happy accident, that as a boy he imbibed that taste for good fiction which is a thing inconceivable to the illiterate. Sneers have been directed against the poverty of his bookshelves in his earlier days of authorship; but I fancy there were not many popular novelists in 1839 who would have taken down with them into the country for a summer sojourn, as Dickens did to Petersham, not only a couple

of Scott's novels, but Goldsmith, Swift, Fielding, Smollett, and the British Essayists; nor is there one of these national classics—unless it be Swift—with whom Dickens' books or letters fail to show him to have been familiar. Of Goldsmith's books, he told Forster, in a letter which the biographer of Goldsmith modestly suppressed, he "had no indifferent perception—to the best of his remembrance—when little more than a child." He discusses with understanding the relative literary merits of the serious and humorous papers in *The Spectator*; and, with regard to another work of unique significance in the history of English fiction, *Robinson Crusoe*, he acutely observed that "one of the most popular books on earth has nothing in it to make anyone laugh or cry." "It is a book," he added, which he "read very much." It may be noted, by the way, that he was an attentive and judicious student of Hogarth; and that thus his criticisms of humorous pictorial art rested upon as broad a basis of comparison as did his judgment of his great predecessors in English humorous fiction.

Among these predecessors it has become usual to assert that Smollett exercised the greatest influence upon Dickens. It is no doubt true that in David Copperfield's library Smollett's books are mentioned first, and in the greatest number, that a vision of Roderick Random and Strap haunted the very wicket-gate at Blunderstone, that the poor little hero's first thought on entering the King's Bench prison was the strange company whom Roderick met in the Marshalsea; and that the references to Smollett and his books are frequent in Dickens' other books and in his letters. Leghorn seemed to him "made illustrious" by Smollett's grave, and in a late period of his life he criticises his chief fictions with admirable justice.

"*Humphry Clinker*," he writes, "is certainly Smollett's best. I am rather divided between *Peregrine Pickle* and *Roderick Random*, both extraordinarily good in their way, which is a way without tenderness; but you will have to read them both, and I send the first volume of *Peregrine* as the richer of the two." An odd volume of *Peregrine* was one of the books with which the waiter at the *Holly Tree Inn* endeavoured to beguile the lonely Christmas of the snowed-up traveller, but the latter "knew every word of it already." In the *Lazy Tour*, "Thomas, now just able to grope his way along, in a doubled-up condition, was no bad embodiment of Commodore Trunnion." I have noted, moreover, coincidences of detail which bear witness to Dickens' familiarity with Smollett's works. To Lieutenant Bowling and Commodore Trunnion, as to Captain Cuttle, every man was a "brother," and to the Commodore, as to Mr. Smallweed, the most abusive substantive addressed to a woman admitted of intensification by the epithet "brimstone." I think Dickens had not forgotten the opening of the *Adventures of an Atom* when he wrote a passage in the opening of his own *Christmas Carol*; and that the characters of Tom Pinch and Tommy Traddles—the former more especially—were not conceived without some thought of honest Strap. Furthermore, it was Smollett's example that probably suggested to Dickens the attractive jingle in the title of his *Nicholas Nickleby*. But these are for the most part mere details. The manner of Dickens as a whole resembles Fielding's more strikingly than Smollett's, as it was only natural that it should. The irony of Smollett is drier than was reconcileable with Dickens' nature; it is only in the occasional extravagances of his humour that the former anticipates anything in the latter, and it is only the coarsest scenes of Dickens

earlier books—such as that between Noah, Charlotte, and Mrs. Sowerberry in *Oliver Twist*—which recall the whole manner of his predecessor. They resemble one another in their descriptive accuracy, and in the accumulation of detail by which they produce instead of obscuring vividness of impression; but it was impossible that Dickens should prefer the general method of the novel of adventure pure and simple, such as Smollett produced after the example of *Gil Blas*, to the less crude form adopted by Fielding, who adhered to earlier and nobler models. With Fielding's, moreover, Dickens' whole nature was congenial; they both had that tenderness which Smollett lacked; and the circumstance that of all English writers of the past, Fielding's name alone was given by Dickens to one of his sons, shows how, like so many of Fielding's readers, he had learnt to love him with an almost personal affection. The very spirit of the author of *Tom Jones*—that gaiety which, to borrow the saying of a recent historian concerning Cervantes, renders even brutality agreeable, and that charm of sympathetic feeling which makes us love those of his characters which he loves himself—seem astir in some of the most delightful passages of Dickens' most delightful books. So in *Pickwick*, to begin with, in which, by the way, Fielding is cited with a twinkle of the eye all his own, and in *Martin Chuzzlewit*, where a chapter opens with a passage which is pure Fielding:

> It was morning, and the beautiful Aurora, of whom, so much hath been written, said, and sung, did, with her rosy fingers, nip and tweak Miss Pecksniff's nose. It was the frolicsome custom of the goddess, in her intercourse with the fair Cherry, to do so; or in more prosaic phrase, the tip of that feature in the sweet girl's countenance was always very red at breakfast-time.

Among the writers of Dickens' own age there were only two, or perhaps three, who in very different degrees and ways, exercised a noticeable influence upon his writings. He once declared to Washington Irving that he kept everything written by that delightful author upon "his shelves, and in his thoughts, and in his heart of hearts." And, doubtless, in Dickens' early days as an author the influence of the American classic may have aided to stimulate the imaginative element in his English admirer's genius, and to preserve him from a grossness of humour into which, after the *Sketches by Boz*, he very rarely allowed himself to lapse. The two other writers were Carlyle, and, as I have frequently noted in previous chapters, the friend and fellow-labourer of Dickens' later manhood, Mr. Wilkie Collins. It is no unique experience that the disciple should influence the master; and in this instance, perhaps with the co-operation of the examples of the modern French theatre, which the two friends had studied in common, Mr. Wilkie Collins' manner had, I think, no small share in bringing about a transformation in that of Dickens. His stories thus gradually lost all traces of the older masters both in general method and in detail; while he came to condense and concentrate his effects in successions of skilfully-arranged scenes. Dickens' debt to Carlyle was, of course, of another nature; and in his works the proofs are not few of his readiness to accept the teachings of one whom he declared he would "go at all times farther to see than any man alive." There was something singular in the admiration these two men felt for one another; for Carlyle, after an acquaintance of almost thirty years, spoke of Dickens as "a most cordial, sincere, clear-sighted, quietly decisive, just, and loving man;" and there is not one of these epithets but seems well con-

sidered and well chosen. But neither Carlyle nor Dickens possessed a moral quality omitted in this list, the quality of patience, which abhors either "quietly" or loudly "deciding" a question before considering it under all its aspects, and in a spirit of fairness to all sides. The *Latter Day Pamphlets*, to confine myself to them,[1] like so much of the political philosophy, if it is to be dignified by that name, which in part Dickens derived from them, were at the time effective strokes of satirical invective; now, their edge seems blunt and their energy inflation. Take the pamphlet on Model Prisons, with its summary of a theory which Dickens sought in every way to enforce upon his readers; or again, that entitled *Downing Street*, which settles the question of party government as a question of the choice between Buffy and Boodle, or, according to Carlyle, the Honourable Felix Parvulus and the Right Honourable Felicissimus Zero. The corrosive power of such sarcasms may be unquestionable; but the angry rhetoric pointed by them becomes part of the nature of those who habitually employ its utterance in lieu of argument; and not a little of the declamatory element in Dickens, which no doubt at first exercised its effect upon a large number of readers, must be ascribed to his reading of a great writer, who was often very much more stimulative than nutritious.

Something, then, he owed to other writers, but it was little indeed in comparison with what he owed to his natural gifts. First among these, I think, must be placed what may, in a word, be called his sensibility—that quality

[1] The passage in *Oliver Twist* (chapter xxxvii.) which illustrates the maxim that "dignity, and even holiness too, sometimes are more questions of coat and waistcoat than some people imagine," may, or may not, be a reminiscence of *Sartor Resartus*, then (1838) first published in a volume.

of which humour, in the more limited sense of the word, and pathos are the twin products. And in Dickens both these were paramount powers, almost equally various in their forms and effective in their operation. According to M. Taine, Dickens, while he excels in irony of a particular sort, being an Englishman, is incapable of being gay. Such profundities are unfathomable to the readers of *Pickwick*; though the French critic may have generalised from Dickens' later writings only. His pathos is not less true than various, for the gradations are marked between the stern tragic pathos of *Hard Times*, the melting pathos of the *Old Curiosity Shop*, *Dombey and Son*, and *David Copperfield*, and the pathos of helplessness which appeals to us in Smike and Jo. But this sensibility would not have given us Dickens' gallery of living pictures, had it not been for the powers of imagination and observation which enabled him spontaneously to exercise it in countless directions. To the way in which his imagination enabled him to identify himself with the figments of his own brain he frequently testified; Dante was not more certain in his celestial and infernal topography than was Dickens as to "every stair in the little midshipman's house," and as to "every young gentleman's bedstead in Dr. Blimber's establishment." One particular class of phenomena may be instanced instead of many, in the observation and poetic reproduction of which his singular natural endowment continually manifested itself —I mean those of the weather. It is not, indeed, often that he rises to a fine image like that in the description of the night in which Ralph Nickleby, ruined and crushed, slinks home to his death.

> The night was dark, and a cold wind blew, driving the clouds furiously and fast before it. There was one black gloomy mass that seemed to follow him: not hurrying in the wild chase with

the others, but lingering sullenly behind, and gliding darkly and stealthily on. He often looked back at this, and, more than once, stopped to let it pass over; but, somehow, when he went forward again, it was still behind him, coming mournfully and slowly up, like a shadowy funeral train.

But he again and again enables us to feel, as if the Christmas morning on which Mr. Pickwick ran gaily down the slide, or as if the "very quiet" moonlit night in the midst of which a sudden sound, like the firing of a gun or a pistol, startled the repose of Lincoln's Inn Fields, were not only what we have often precisely experienced in country villages or in London squares, but as if they were the very morning and the very night which we *must* experience, if we were feeling the glow of wintry merriment, or the awful chill of the presentiment of evil in a dead hour. In its lower form this combination of the powers of imagination and observation has the rapidity of wit, and, indeed, sometimes *is* wit. The gift of suddenly finding out what a man, a thing, a combination of man and thing, is like—this, too, comes by nature, and there is something electrifying in its sudden exercise, even on the most trivial occasions, as when Flora, delighted with Little Dorrit's sudden rise to fortune, requests to know all

about the good, dear, quiet little thing, and all the changes of her fortunes, carriage people now, no doubt, and horses without number most romantic, a coat-of-arms of course, and wild beasts on their hind legs, showing it as if it was a copy they had done with mouths from ear to ear, good gracious!

But nature, when she gifted Dickens with sensibility, observation, and imagination, had bestowed upon him yet another boon in the quality which seems more prominent

than any other in his whole being. The vigour of Dickens—a mental and moral vigour supported by a splendid physical organism—was the parent of some of his foibles; among the rest, of his tendency to exaggeration. No fault has been more frequently found with his workmanship than this; nor can he be said to have defended himself very successfully on this head when he declared that he did "not recollect ever to have heard or seen the charge of exaggeration made against a feeble performance, though, in its feebleness, it may have been most untrue." But without this vigour he could not have been creative as he was; and in him there were accordingly united with rare completeness a swift responsiveness to the impulses of humour and pathos, an inexhaustible fertility in discovering and inventing materials for their exercise, and the constant creative desire to give to these newly-created materials a vivid plastic form.

And the mention of this last-named gift in Dickens suggests the query whether, finally, there is anything in his *manner* as a writer which may prevent the continuance of his extraordinary popularity. No writer can be great without a manner of his own; and that Dickens had such a manner his most supercilious censurer will readily allow. His terse narrative power, often intensely humorous in its unblushing and unwinking gravity, and often deeply pathetic in its simplicity, is as characteristic of his manner as is the supreme felicity of phrase in which he has no equal. As to the latter, I should hardly know where to begin and where to leave off were I to attempt to illustrate it. But, to take two instances of different kinds of wit, I may cite a passage in Guster's narrative of her interview with Lady Dedlock: "And so I took the letter from her, and she said she had nothing to give me; and *I said I was poor myself,*

and consequently wanted nothing;" and, of a different kind, the account in one of his letters of a conversation with Macready, in which the great tragedian, after a solemn but impassioned commendation of his friend's reading, "put his hand upon my breast and pulled out his pocket-handkerchief, and *I felt as if I were doing somebody to his Werner*." These, I think, were among the most characteristic merits of his style. It also, and more especially in his later years, had its characteristic faults. The danger of degenerating into mannerism is incident to every original manner. There is mannerism in most of the great English prose-writers of Dickens' age—in Carlyle, in Macaulay, in Thackeray—but in none of them is there more mannerism than in Dickens himself. In his earlier writings, in *Nicholas Nickleby*, for instance (I do not, of course, refer to the Portsmouth boards), and even in *Martin Chuzzlewit*, there is much stageyness; but in his later works his own mannerism had swallowed up that of the stage, and, more especially in serious passages, his style had become what M. Taine happily characterises as *le style tourmenté*. His choice of words remained throughout excellent, and his construction of sentences clear. He told Mr. Wilkie Collins that "underlining was not his nature;" and in truth he had no need to emphasise his expressions, or to bid the reader "go back upon their meaning." He recognised his responsibility, as a popular writer, in keeping the vocabulary of the language pure; and in *Little Dorrit* he even solemnly declines to use the French word *trousseau*. In his orthography, on the other hand, he was not free from Americanisms; and his interpunctuation was consistently odd. But these are trifles; his more important mannerisms were, like many really dangerous faults of style, only the excess of characteristic excellences. Thus it was

he who elaborated with unprecedented effect, that humorous species of paraphrase which, as one of the most imitable devices of his style, has also been the most persistently imitated. We are all tickled when Grip, the raven, "issues orders for the instant preparation of innumerable kettles for purposes of tea;" or when Mr. Pecksniff's eye is "piously upraised, with something of that expression which the poetry of ages has attributed to a domestic bird, when breathing its last amid the ravages of an electric storm;" but in the end the device becomes a mere trick of circumlocution. Another mannerism which grew upon Dickens, and was faithfully imitated by several of his disciples, was primarily due to his habit of turning a fact, fancy, or situation round on every side. This consisted in the reiteration of a construction, or of part of a construction, in the strained rhetorical fashion to which he at last accustomed us in spite of ourselves, but to which we were loath to submit in his imitators. These and certain other peculiarities, which it would be difficult to indicate without incurring the charge of hypercriticism, hardened as the style of Dickens hardened; and, for instance, in the *Tale of Two Cities* his mannerisms may be seen side by side in glittering array. By way of compensation, the occasional solecisms and vulgarisms of his earlier style (he only very gradually ridded himself of the cockney habit of punning) no longer marred his pages; and he ceased to break or lapse occasionally, in highly-impassioned passages, into blank verse.

From first to last Dickens' mannerism, like everything which he made part of himself, was not merely assumed on occasion, but was, so to speak, absorbed into his nature. It shows itself in almost everything that he wrote in his later years, from the most carefully-elaborated chapters of

his books down to the most deeply-felt passages of his most familiar correspondence, in the midst of the most genuine pathos and most exuberant humour of his books, and in the midst of the sound sense and unaffected piety of his private letters. Future generations may, for this very reason, be perplexed and irritated by what we merely stumbled at, and may wish that what is an element hardly separable from many of Dickens' compositions were away from them, as one wishes away from his signature that horrible flourish which in his letters he sometimes represents himself as too tired to append.

But no distaste for his mannerisms is likely to obscure the sense of his achievements in the branch of literature to which he devoted the full powers of his genius and the best energies of his nature. He introduced indeed no new species of prose fiction into our literature. In the historical novel he made two far from unsuccessful essays, in the earlier of which in particular—*Barnaby Rudge*—he showed a laudable desire to enter into the spirit of a past age; but he was without the reading or the patience of either the author of *Waverley* or the author of *The Virginians*, and without the fine historic enthusiasm which animates the broader workmanship of *Westward Ho*. For the purely imaginative romance, on the other hand, of which in some of his works Lord Lytton was the most prominent representative in contemporary English literature, Dickens' genius was not without certain affinities; but to feel his full strength, he needed to touch the earth with his feet. Thus it is no mere phrase to say of him that he found the ideal in the real, and drew his inspirations from the world around him. Perhaps the strongest temptation which ever seemed likely to divert him from the sounder forms in which his masterpieces were cast, lay in the

direction of the *novel with a purpose*, the fiction intended primarily and above all things to promote the correction of some social abuse, or the achievement of some social reform. But in spite of himself, to whom the often voiceless cause of the suffering and the oppressed was at all times dearer than any mere literary success, he was preserved from binding his muse, as his friend Cruikshank bound his art, handmaid in a service with which freedom was irreconcileable. His artistic instinct helped him in this, and perhaps also the consciousness that where, as in *The Chimes* or in *Hard Times*, he had gone furthest in this direction, there had been something jarring in the result. Thus, under the influences described above, he carried on the English novel mainly in the directions which it had taken under its early masters, and more especially in those in which the essential attributes of his own genius prompted him to excel.

Among the elements on which the effect alike of the novelist's and of the dramatist's work must, apart from style and diction, essentially depend, that of construction is obviously one of the most significant. In this Dickens was, in the earlier period of his authorship, very far from strong. This was due in part to the accident that he began his literary career as a writer of *Sketches*, and that his first continuous book, *Pickwick*, was originally designed as little more than a string of such. It was due in a still greater measure to the influence of those masters of English fiction with whom he had been familiar from boyhood, above all to Smollett. And though, by dint of his usual energy, he came to be able to invent a plot so generally effective as that of *A Tale of Two Cities*, or, I was about to say, of *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, yet on this head he had had to contend against a special difficulty; I mean, of course,

the publication of most of his books in monthly or even weekly numbers. In the case of a writer both pathetic and humorous, the serial method of publication leads the public to expect its due allowance of both pathos and humour every month or week, even if each number, to borrow a homely simile applied in *Oliver Twist* to books in general, need not contain "the tragic and the comic scenes in as regular alternation as the layers of red and white in a side of streaky bacon." And again, as in a melodrama of the old school, each serial division has, if possible, to close emphatically, effectively, with a promise of yet stranger, more touching, more laughable things to come. On the other hand, with this form of publication repetition is frequently necessary by way of "reminder" to indolent readers, whose memory needs refreshing after the long pauses between the acts. Fortunately, Dickens abhorred living, as it were, from hand to mouth, and thus diminished the dangers to which, I cannot help thinking, Thackeray at times almost succumbed. Yet, notwithstanding, in the arrangement of his incidents and the contrivance of his plots it is often impossible to avoid noting the imperfection of the machinery, or at least the traces of effort. I have already said under what influences, in my opinion, Dickens acquired a constructive skill which would have been conspicuous in most other novelists.

If in the combination of parts the workmanship of Dickens was not invariably of the best, on the other hand in the invention of those parts themselves he excelled, his imaginative power and dramatic instinct combining to produce an endless succession of effective scenes and situations, ranging through almost every variety of the pathetic and the humorous. In no direction was nature a more powerful aid to art with him than in this.

From his very boyhood he appears to have possessed in a developed form what many others may possess in its germ, the faculty of converting into a scene—putting, as it were, into a frame—personages that came under his notice, and the background on which he saw them. Who can forget the scene in *David Copperfield*, in which the friendless little boy attracts the wonderment of the good people of the publichouse where—it being a special occasion—he has demanded a glass of their "very best ale, with a head to it"? In the autobiographical fragment already cited, where the story appears in almost the same words, Dickens exclaims:

> Here we stand, all three, before me now, in my study in Devonshire Terrace. The landlord, in his shirt-sleeves, leaning against the bar window-frame; his wife, looking over the little half-door; and I, in some confusion, looking up at them from outside the partition.

He saw the scene while he was an actor in it. Already the *Sketches by Boz* showed the exuberance of this power, and in his last years more than one paper in the delightful *Uncommercial Traveller* series proved it to be as inexhaustible as ever, while the art with which it was exercised had become more refined. Who has better described (for who was more sensitive to it?) the mysterious influence of crowds, and who the pitiful pathos of solitude? Who has ever surpassed Dickens in his representations, varied a thousandfold, but still appealing to the same emotions, common to us all, of the crises or turning-points of human life? Who has dwelt with a more potent effect on that catastrophe which the drama of every human life must reach; whose scenes of death in its pathetic, pitiful, reverend, terrible, ghastly forms speak more to the imagination and more to the heart? There is,

however, one species of scenes in which the genius of Dickens seems to me to exercise a still stronger spell—those which *precede* a catastrophe, which are charged like thunderclouds with the coming storm. And here the constructive art is at work; for it is the arrangement of the incidents, past and to come, combined by anticipation in the mind of the reader, which gives their extraordinary force to such scenes as the nocturnal watching of Nancy by Noah, or Carker's early walk to the railway station, where he is to meet his doom. Extremely powerful, too, in a rather different way, is the scene in *Little Dorrit*, described in a word or two, of the parting of Bar and Physician at dawn, after they have "found out Mr. Merdle's complaint:"

> Before parting, at Physician's door, they both looked up at the sunny morning sky, into which the smoke of a few early fires, and the breath and voices of a few early stirrers, were peacefully rising, and then looked round upon the immense city, and said: "If all those hundreds and thousands of beggared people who were yet asleep could only know, as they two spoke, the ruin that impended over them, what a fearful cry against one miserable soul would go up to Heaven!"

Nor is it awe only, but pity also, which he is able thus to move beforehand, as in *Dombey and Son*, in the incomparable scenes leading up to little Paul's death.

More diverse opinions have been expressed as to Dickens' mastery of that highest part of the novelist's art, which we call characterisation. Undoubtedly, the characters which he draws are included in a limited range. Yet I question whether their range can be justly termed narrow as compared with that commanded by any other great English novelist except Scott, or with those of many novelists of other literatures except Balzac. But

within his own range Dickens is unapproached. His novels do not altogether avoid the common danger of uninteresting heroes and insipid heroines; but only a very few of his heroes are conventionally declamatory like Nicholas Nickleby, and few of his heroines simper sentimentally like Rose Maylie. Nor can I for a moment assent to the condemnation which has been pronounced upon all the female characters in Dickens' books, as more or less feeble or artificial. At the same time it is true that from women of a mightier mould Dickens' imagination turns aside; he could not have drawn a Dorothea Casaubon any more than he could have drawn Romola herself. Similarly, heroes of the chivalrous or magnanimous type, representatives of generous effort in a great cause, will not easily be met with in his writings: he never even essayed the picture of an artist devoted to art for her own sake.

It suited the genius, and in later years perhaps the temper, of Dickens as an author, to leave out of sight those "public virtues" to which no man was in truth less blind than himself, and to remain content with the illustration of types of the private or domestic kind. We may cheerfully take to us the censure that our great humorist was in nothing more English than in this—that his sympathy with the affections of the hearth and the home knew almost no bounds. A symbolisation of this may be found in the honour which, from the *Sketches* and *Pickwick* onwards through a long series of Christmas books and Christmas Numbers, Dickens, doubtless very consciously, paid to the one great festival of English family life. Yet so far am I from agreeing with those critics who think that he is hereby lowered to the level of the poets of the teapot and the plum-pudding, that I am at a loss how to

express my admiration for this side of his genius—tender with the tenderness of Cowper, playful with the playfulness of Goldsmith, natural with the naturalness of the author of *Amelia*. Who was ever more at home with children than he, and, for that matter, with babies to begin with? Mr. Horne relates how he once heard a lady exclaim: "Oh, do read to us about the baby; Dickens is capital at a baby!" Even when most playful, most farcical concerning children, his fun is rarely without something of true tenderness, for he knew the meaning of that dreariest solitude which he has so often pictured, but nowhere, of course, with a truthfulness going so straight to the heart as in *David Copperfield*—the solitude of a child left to itself. Another wonderfully true child-character is that of Pip in *Great Expectations*, who is also, as his years progress, an admirable study of boy-nature. For Dickens thoroughly understood what that mysterious variety of humankind really is, and was always, if one may so say, on the look-out for him. He knew him in the brightness and freshness which makes true *ingénus* of such delightful characters (rare enough in fiction) as Walter Gay and Mrs. Lirriper's grandson. He knew him in his festive mood—witness the amusing letter in which he describes a water-expedition at Eton with his son and two of his irrepressible schoolfellows. He knew him in his precocity—the boy of about three feet high at the George and Vulture, "in a hairy cap and fustian overalls, whose garb bespoke a laudable ambition to attain in time the elevation of an hostler;" and the thing on the roof of the Harrisburg coach, which, when the rain was over, slowly upreared itself, and patronisingly piped out the inquiry: "Well now, stranger, I guess you find this a'most like an English arternoon, hey?" He

knew the Gavroche who danced attendance on Mr. Quilp at his wharf, and those strangest, but by no means least true, types of all, the pupil-teachers in Mr. Fagin's academy.

But these, with the exception of the last-named, which show much shrewd and kindly insight into the paradoxes of human nature, are of course the mere *croquis* of the great humorist's pencil. His men and women, and the passions, the desires, the loves, and hatreds that agitate them, he has usually chosen to depict on that background of domestic life which is in a greater or less degree common to us all. And it is thus also that he has secured to himself the vast public which vibrates very differently from a mere class or section of society to the touch of a popular speaker or writer. "The more," he writes, "we see of life and its brevity, and the world and its varieties, the more we know that no exercise of our abilities in any art, but the addressing of it to the great ocean of humanity in which we are drops, and not to bye-ponds (very stagnant) here and there, ever can or ever will lay the foundations of an endurable retrospect." The types of character which in his fictions he chiefly delights in reproducing are accordingly those which most of us have opportunities enough of comparing with the realities around us; and this test, a sound one within reasonable limits, was the test he demanded. To no other author were his own characters ever more real; and Forster observes, that "what he had most to notice in Dickens at the very outset of his career, was his indifference to any praise of his performances on the merely literary side, compared with the higher recognition of them as bits of actual life, with the meaning and purpose, on their part, and the responsibility on his, of realities, rather than creations of fancy." It is, then, the favourite growths of our own age and country for which we shall most readily

look in his works, and not look in vain: avarice and prodigality; pride in all its phases; hypocrisy in its endless varieties, unctuous and plausible, fawning and self-satisfied, formal and moral; and, on the other side, faithfulness, simplicity, long-suffering patience, and indomitable heroic good-humour. Do we not daily make room on the pavement for Mr. Dombey erect, solemn, and icy, alongside of whom in the road Mr. Carker deferentially walks his sleek horse? Do we not know more than one Anthony Chuzzlewit laying up money for himself and his son, and a curse for both along with it; and many a Richard Carston, sinking, sinking, as the hope grows feebler that Justice or Fortune will at last help one who has not learnt how to help himself? And will not prodigals of a more buoyant kind, like the immortal Mr. Micawber (though, maybe, with an eloquence less ornate than his), when *their* boat is on the shore and *their* bark is on the sea, become "perfectly business-like and perfectly practical," and propose, in acknowledgment of a parting gift we had neither hoped nor desired to see again, "bills" or, if we should prefer it, "a bond, or any other description of security?" All this will happen to us, as surely as we shall be button-holed by Pecksniffs in a state of philanthropic exultation; and watched round corners by 'umble but observant Uriah Heeps; and affronted in what is best in us by the worst hypocrite of all, the hypocrite of religion, who flaunts in our eyes his greasy substitute for what he calls the "light of terewth." To be sure, unless it be Mr. Chadband and those of his tribe, we shall find the hypocrite and the man-out-at-elbows in real life less endurable than their representatives in fiction; for Dickens well understood, "that if you do not administer a disagreeable character carefully, the public have a decided tendency to think that the

story is disagreeable, and not merely the fictitious form." His economy is less strict with characters of the opposite class, true copies of Nature's own handiwork—the Tom Pinches and Trotty Vecks and Clara Peggottys, who reconcile us with our kind, and Mr. Pickwick himself, "a human being replete with benevolence," to borrow a phrase from a noble passage in Dickens' most congenial predecessor. These characters in Dickens have a warmth which only the creations of Fielding and Smollett had possessed before, and which, like these old masters, he occasionally carries to excess. At the other extreme stand those characters in which the art of Dickens, always in union with the promptings of his moral nature, illustrates the mitigating or redeeming qualities observable even in the outcasts of our civilisation. To me his figures of this kind, when they are not too intensely elaborated, are not the least touching; and there is something as pathetic in the uncouth convict Magwitch as in the consumptive crossing-sweeper Jo.

As a matter of course, it is possible to take exceptions of one kind or another to some of the characters created by Dickens in so extraordinary a profusion. I hardly know of any other novelist less obnoxious to the charge of repeating himself; though, of course, many characters in his earlier or shorter works contained in themselves the germs of later and fuller developments. But Bob Sawyer and Dick Swiveller, Noah Claypole and Uriah Heep are at least sufficiently independent variations on the same themes. On the other hand, Filer and Cute, in *The Chimes*, were the first sketches of Gradgrind and Bounderby, in *Hard Times*, and Clemency in *The Battle of Life*, prefigures Peggotty in *David Copperfield*. No one could seriously quarrel with such repetitions as these, and

there are remarkably few of them; for the fertile genius of Dickens took delight in the variety of its creativeness, and, as if to exemplify this, there was no relation upon the contrasted humours of which he better loved to dwell than that of partnership. It has been seen how rarely his inventive power condescended to supplement itself by what in the novel corresponds to the mimicry of the stage, and what in truth is as degrading to the one as it is to the other—the reproduction of originals *from real life*. On the other hand, he carries his habit too far of making a particular phrase do duty as an index of a character. This trick also is a trick of the stage, where it often enough makes the judicious grieve. Many may be inclined to censure it in Dickens as one of several forms of the exaggeration which is so frequently condemned in him. There was no charge to which he was more sensitive; and in the preface to *Martin Chuzzlewit* he accordingly (not for the first time) turned round upon the objectors, declaring roundly that "what is exaggeration to one class of minds and perceptions is plain truth to another;" and hinting a doubt "whether it is *always* the writer who colours highly, or whether it is now and then the reader whose eye for colour is a little dull." I certainly do not think that the term "exaggerated" is correctly applied to such conventional characters of sensational romance as Rosa Dartle, who has, as it were, lost her way into *David Copperfield*, while Hortense and Madame Defarge seem to be in their proper places in *Bleak House*, and *A Tale of Two Cities*. In his earlier writings, and in the fresher and less overcharged serious parts of his later books, he rarely if ever paints black in black; even the Jew Fagin has a moment of relenting against the sleeping

Oliver; he is not that unreal thing, a "demon," whereas Sikes is that real thing, a brute. On the other hand, certainly he at times makes his characters more laughable than nature; few great humorists have so persistently sought to efface the line which separates the barely possible from the morally probable. This was, no doubt, largely due to his inclination towards the grotesque, which a severer literary training might have taught him to restrain; thus he liked to introduce insane or imbecile personages into fiction, where, as in real life, they are often dangerous to handle. It is to his sense of the grotesque, rather than to any deep-seated satirical intention, and certainly not to any want of reverence or piety in his very simple and very earnest nature, that I would likewise ascribe the exaggeration and unfairness of which he is guilty against Little Bethel and all its works. But in this, as in other instances, no form of humour requires more delicate handling than the grotesque, and none is more liable to cause fatigue. Latterly, Dickens was always adding to his gallery of eccentric portraits, and, if inner currents may be traced by outward signs, it may be worth while to apply the test of his *names*, which become more and more odd as their owners deviate more and more from the path of nature. Who more simply and yet more happily named than the leading members of the Pickwick Club—from the poet, Mr. Snodgrass, to the sportsman, Mr. Winkle—Nathaniel, not Daniel; but with Veneering and Lammle, and Boffin and Venus, and Crisparkle and Grewgious—be they actual names or not—we feel instinctively that we are in the region of the transnormal.

Lastly, in their descriptive power and the faithfulness with which they portray the life and ways of particular periods or countries, of special classes, professions, or other

divisions of mankind, the books of Dickens are, again of course within their range, unequalled. He sought his materials chiefly at home, though his letters from Italy and Switzerland and America, and his French pictures in sketch and story, show how much wider a field his descriptive powers might have covered. The *Sketches by Boz* and the *Pickwick Papers* showed a mastery, unsurpassed before or since, in the description of the life of English society in its middle and lower classes, and in *Oliver Twist* he lifted the curtain from some of the rotten parts of our civilisation. This history of a workhouse child also sounded the note of that sympathy with the poor which gave to Dickens' descriptions of their sufferings and their struggles a veracity beyond mere accuracy of detail. He was still happier in describing their household virtues, their helpfulness to one another, their compassion for those who are the poorest of all—the friendless and the outcast—as he did in his *Old Curiosity Shop*, and in most of his Christmas books. His pictures of middle-class life abounded in kindly humour; but the humour and pathos of poverty—more especially the poverty which has not yet lost its self-respect—commended themselves most of all to his descriptive power. Where, as in *Nicholas Nickleby* and later works, he essayed to describe the manners of the higher classes, he was, as a rule, far less successful: partly because there was in his nature a vein of rebellion against the existing system of society, so that except in his latest books, he usually approached a description of members of its dominant orders with a satirical intention, or at least an undertone of bitterness. At the same time, I demur to the common assertion that Dickens could not draw a real gentleman. All that can be said is that it very rarely suited his purpose to do so, supposing the term to include manners as well as feelings

and actions ; though Mr. Twemlow, in *Our Mutual Friend*, might be instanced as a (perhaps rather conscious) exception of one kind, and Sir Leicester Dedlock, in the latter part of *Bleak House*, as another. Moreover, a closer examination of Lord Frederick Verisopht and Cousin Feenix will show that, gull as the one, and ninny as the other is, neither has anything that can be called ungentlemanly about him ; on the contrary, the characters, on the whole, rather plead in favour of the advantage than of the valuelessness of blue blood. As for Dickens' other noblemen, whom I find enumerated in an American dictionary of his characters, they are nearly all mere passing embodiments of satirical fancies, which pretend to be nothing more.

Another ingenious enthusiast has catalogued the numerous callings, professions, and trades of the personages appearing in Dickens' works. I cannot agree with the criticism that in his personages the man is apt to become forgotten in the externals of his calling—the barrister's wig and gown, as it were, standing for the barrister, and the beadle's cocked hat and staff for the beadle. But he must have possessed in its perfection the curious detective faculty of deducing a man's occupation from his manners. To him nothing wore a neutral tint, and no man or woman was featureless. He was, it should be remembered, always observing ; half his life he was afoot. When he undertook to describe any novel or unfamiliar kind of manners, he spared no time or trouble in making a special study of his subject. He was not content to know the haunts of the London thieves by hearsay, or to read the history of opium-smoking and its effects in Blue-books. From the office of his journal in London, we find him starting on these self-imposed commissions, and from his hotel in New York. The whole art of descriptive reporting, which has no doubt produced a

large quantity of trashy writing, but has also been of real service in arousing a public interest in neglected corners of our social life, was, if not actually set on foot, at any rate reinvigorated and vitalised by him. No one was so delighted to notice the oddities which habit and tradition stereotype in particular classes of men; a complete natural history of the country actor, the London landlady, and the British waiter might be compiled from his pages. This power of observation and description extended from human life to that of animals. His habits of life could not but make him the friend of dogs, and there is some reason for a title which was bestowed on him in a paper in a London magazine concerning his own dogs—the Landseer of Fiction. His letters are full of delightful details concerning these friends and companions, Turk, Linda, and the rest of them; nor is the family of their fictitious counterparts, culminating (intellectually) in Merrylegs, less numerous and delightful. Cats were less congenial to Dickens, perhaps because he had no objection to changing house; and they appear in his works in no more attractive form than as the attendant spirits of Mrs. Pipchin and of Mr. Krook. But for the humours of animals in general he had a wonderfully quick eye. Of his ravens I have already spoken. The pony Whisker is the type of kind old gentlemen's ponies. In one of his letters occurs an admirably droll description of the pig-market at Boulogne; and the best unscientific description ever given of a spider was imagined by Dickens at Broadstairs, when in his solitude he thought

> of taming spiders, as Baron Trenck did. There is one in my cell (with a speckled body and twenty-two very decided knees) who seems to know me.

In everything, whether animate or inanimate, he found out at once the characteristic feature, and reproduced it in

words of faultless precision. This is the real secret of his descriptive power, the exercise of which it would be easy to pursue through many other classes of subjects. Scenery, for its own sake, he rarely cared to describe; but no one better understood how to reproduce the combined effect of scenery and weather on the predisposed mind. Thus London and its river in especial are, as I have said, haunted by the memory of Dickens' books. To me it was for years impossible to pass near London Bridge at night, or to idle in the Temple on summer days, or to frequent a hundred other localities on or near the Thames, without instinctively recalling pictures scattered through the works of Dickens—in this respect, also, a real *liber veritatis*.

Thus, and in many ways which it would be labour lost to attempt to describe, and by many a stroke or touch of genius which it would be idle to seek to reproduce in paraphrase, the most observing and the most imaginative of our English humorists revealed to us that infinite multitude of associations which binds men together, and makes us members one of another. But though observation and imagination might discern and discover these associations, sympathy—the sympathy of a generous human heart with humanity—alone could breathe into them the warmth of life. Happily, to most men, there is one place consecrated above others to the feelings of love and goodwill; "that great altar where the worst among us sometimes perform the worship of the heart, and where the best have offered up such sacrifices and done such deeds of heroism as, chronicled, would put the proudest temples of old time, with all their vaunting annals, to the blush." It was thus that Dickens spoke of the sanctity of *home*; and, English in many things, he was most English in that love of home to which he was never weary of testifying. But, though the "path-

way of the sublime" may have been closed to him, he knew well enough that the interests of a people and the interests of humanity are mightier than the domestic loves and cares of any man; and he conscientiously addressed himself, as to the task of his life, to the endeavour to knit humanity together. The method which he, by instinct and by choice, more especially pursued was that of seeking to show the "good in everything." This it is that made him, unreasonably sometimes, ignobly never, the champion of the poor, the helpless, the outcast. He was often tempted into a rhetoric too loud and too shrill, into a satire neither fine nor fair; for he was impatient, but not impatient of what he thought true and good. His purpose, however, was worthy of his powers; nor is there recorded among the lives of English men of letters any more single-minded in its aim, and more successful in the pursuit of it, than his. He was much criticised in his lifetime; and he will, I am well aware, be often criticised in the future by keener and more capable judges than myself. They may miss much in his writings that I find in them; but, unless they find one thing there, it were better that they never opened one of his books. He has indicated it himself when criticising a literary performance by a clever writer:

> In this little MS. everything is too much patronised and condescended to, whereas the slightest touch of feeling for the rustic who is of the earth earthy, or of sisterhood with the homely servant who has made her face shine in her desire to please, would make a difference that the writer can generally imagine without trying it. You don't want any sentiment laboriously made out in such a thing. You don't want any maudlin show of it. But you do want a pervading suggestion that it is there.

The sentiment which Dickens means is the salt which will give a fresh savour of their own to his works so long as our language endures.

THE END.

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